# BRANDON COYLE'S WIFE

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

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# *Brandon Coyle's Wife*

A SEQUEL TO A SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

By MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of

"The Unloved Wife," "Why Did He Wed Her?"
"For Whose Sake," "Her Love or Her Life," Etc.

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BRANDON COYLE'S WIFE


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# Brandon Coyle's Wife

## CHAPTER I

### A REJECTED BRIDEGROOM

He'll be forgotten—like old debts
  By persons who are used to borrow;
Forgotten—like the sun that sets,
  When shines the new one the morrow;
Forgotten like the luscious peach
  That blessed the school-boy last September;
Forgotten—like the maiden speech,
  That all men praise and none remember.

PRAED.

"I AM not, I never was, and never can be, the betrothed of Mr. Brandon Coyle; therefore there can be no marriage ceremony performed now, or ever, between that person and myself."

These words fell with a stupefying effect upon the ears of the assembled company.

"Have we heard aright?" they asked themselves.

"Oh, she is mad!" muttered Brandon Coyle, recovering his speech, of which the shock had momentarily deprived him. "Her head is turned! Her words are false as reckless upon the very face of them! The whole neighborhood knows of our betrothal, indorsed by her grandfather!"

*"My dear!"* said Lord Beaudevere, in a low tone of surprise, pain and expostulation, while all the company except Net Fleming looked on in wonder as to what they had heard and seen, and what was to be expected further.

Brandon Coyle, his lips grimly shut, his face pale, and his eyes on fire, strode up to the table and fixed his gaze

upon the face of the young lady, as if in his madness he fancied that his look could quell her.

But she would not meet his eyes. She kept hers fixed on the table, while she resumed her speech:

"You are all surprised and incredulous; but I will explain and convince you. At the time Mr. Brandon Coyle asked my hand of my grandfather, the late earl, he was not free to contract marriage. Neither my grandfather nor myself knew this fact at the time. My grandfather died in ignorance of it. I have only known it for a very few days."

"IT IS FALSE!! It is false as——!!! Some enemy has abused this lady's ear with a base slander!" burst forth Brandon Coyle in a fury, as he struck his clenched hand down upon the table.

"This is very painful! Very painful indeed! This is a serious charge to bring against your affianced husband, the man once accepted by yourself, and approved by your grandfather, my dear," said Lord Beaudevere, in a tone of remonstrance.

"I do not pretend to know what she means by it!" exclaimed Coyle, in a voice full of affected sorrow.

"What reason have you for your words, my daughter?" inquired the priest.

"If there be any grounds for this charge, Lady Arielle," said the lawyer, in slow and measured syllables, "your friends would like to hear them."

"He was married on the ninth of last September to a young woman named Christelle Ken, of the village of Miston——"

"It is as false as——!!!" exclaimed Coyle, losing all self-control, and falling into bad language.

"Brandon! Brandon! recollect yourself, my *dear* boy! Arielle, my child, this is a very extraordinary charge!" said the baron, who was beginning to be very much distressed and perplexed.

"I can *prove* the charge, Lord Beaudevere. This letter was written to me by his wife. I received it on the day that my dear grandfather was attacked with his last and fatal sickness. Inclosed you will find the marriage certificate. Will you pass both to Mr. Brandon Coyle and let him examine them, and decide whether he will leave me

now in peace, or whether he will compel me to a further exposure of his evil deeds?"

Lord Beaudevere took the letter and handed it to Coyle, who received it with a scowl.

"A forgery! A falsehood! An impudent imposition!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had glanced at the contents; and he tore it fiercely into pieces and threw it upon the floor.

Lord Beaudevere then handed him the marriage "lines" of poor Kit.

"Why do you insult me with this thing? A farce!" he exclaimed, as he seized and tore the second paper

"Gentlemen," he continued, more calmly, "these are miserable tricks of some enemy bent on injuring me and annoying my promised bride. And but that they *have* disturbed Lady Arielle, they would be beneath contempt. Surely you need not regard such base trifles?"

"Where did you get these papers, my dear?" inquired Lord Beaudevere.

"One moment, my lord. I wish to ask that person if he really pretends to hold me to any engagement."

"Most certainly I do," distinctly answered Coyle.

"And to deny the authenticity of these documents?"

"Assuredly I do!"

"Then you compel me to prove their authenticity by exposing you more fully," said Lady Arielle; and turning her head to where Net stood veiled, she asked:

"Mrs. Fleming, will you come here to my support?"

Net left her seat, walked around the table and stood at the back of Arielle's chair, with one hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Question Mrs. Fleming, my lord. I do not think she will like to tell the story except in answer to questions," said Arielle.

At the sight of Net, Brandon Coyle had staggered back and dropped upon a seat, with every vestige of color drained from his dark face.

"My dear, do you really know anything certain about this strange story that has been brought to Lady Arielle? Is there a shadow of truth in it?" inquired Lord Beaudevere, still incredulous and bewildered.

"Mrs. Fleming is my bitter enemy. Her testimony

should not be taken against me!" exclaimed Brandon Coyle, madly.

"I am no man's enemy, and so little yours that I am pained that justice obliges me to speak of you as I must do," said Net, gently.

Then turning to Lord Beaudevere she answered him, saying:

"I know this much—that Mr. Brandon Coyle is either legally married to Christelle Ken, the daughter of James Ken, the fisherman, of Miston, or else he has deceived her by a false marriage. Yes, Lord Beaudevere, this is absolutely true. I could tell you much more to the point if necessary, but the subject is a painful one. Besides, I do not think Mr. Brandon Coyle will deny the facts to *me,* to whom he promised ten days ago that in one week from that date he would do justice to the girl by acknowledging her as his wife."

While Net spoke Brandon Coyle sat shaking with rage and fear as with an ague. His castles in the air were tumbling all around him, and threatening even to crush him under their ruins.

"Where is this girl, my dear?" mildly inquired the distressed baron.

*"Ay! where is she?"* fiercely demanded Brandon Coyle. "Produce her! If she is my wife, let her come forward and face me with the claim! *Where is she?"*

"Where is she, my dear Mrs. Fleming?" inquired the baron.

"Mr. Brandon Coyle is most probably the only person here who can answer that question; for, on the very night before the day upon which he had promised to acknowledge her, she disappeared from my house, and has not been heard of since. Her parents are in the deepest distress at her strange absence. Mr. Brandon Coyle probably knows her whereabouts," gravely answered Net.

"I know nothing about the infernal girl!" frantically exclaimed Coyle. "It is a base conspiracy to ruin me!"

Here old Mr. Coyle arose to his feet and advanced until he stood face to face with his nephew, when—wiping his round, close-cropped, silver-gray head until it shone like a metallic ball, as was his custom when heated or excited—he burst forth with a torrent of indignation.

"Conspiracy or *not* conspiracy, sir, I charge you to disprove these accusations before you ever dare to set foot in my house again! If they are true, sir—if they are true, by——" (here the old squire sealed his earnestness with an oath not to be recorded) "I will bequeath Caveland and all my money to found an asylum for unconvicted *thieves* and *cut-throats* before I will leave you one shilling!"

"You are all against me!" fiercely exclaimed Coyle, with the aspect of a hyena at bay.

"You evil son of an evil father, acquit yourself of this charge, or never look me in the face again!" exclaimed Old Coyle, turning away, and trotting back to his seat.

Net, feeling somehow as if she were a witness subpœnaed on a trial in a court of justice, said:

"Nothing, indeed, but the strongest conviction of duty would cause me to make the disclosures I am about to do. Mr. Brandon Coyle has said that he would not know Kit Ken if she were now to enter this room. Yet, I myself have seen Mr. Brandon Coyle in the company of Kit Ken, under circumstances that convinced me that he was her lover.

"It was on the night of November the twenty-first, long after midnight and near morning, when I was awakened out of sleep by the noise of something falling. Thinking nothing worse had happened than that our cat had knocked some of the crockery down off the dresser, I arose, lighted a candle, and went into the kitchen, where I found Mr. Brandon Coyle."

The old squire groaned aloud and suppressed an oath.

"Bah!" exclaimed Coyle, defiantly. "I explained to Mrs. Fleming, at the time, how it was! I had arrived from London by the midnight train; taking the short cut from Miston to Caveland, had come down the church lane, passing Bird's Nest Cottage, saw that the careless inmates —women and children, don't you know—had left the door open all night, went in through the darkness to the kitchen to call the negligent servant to remedy the mistake, and —fell over the coal-scuttle! The noise aroused the lady of the house, who came forth, and finding me standing in the middle of the kitchen caressing my aggrieved shin, immediately accused me of—the fiend knows what! Coming

after the silver spoons, I think, was the first form of the indictment! Of course, as I said before, I explained the good intention that had brought me to the house; but she would not believe me! She does not believe me now even though she must have found her silver plate all right," he added, in a tone of assumed jollity and recklessness.

No one, however, paid any serious attention to his words; but Dr. Bennet requested Mrs. Fleming to proceed.

Net resumed her account of the night's alarm:

"On my demanding of the intruder the meaning of his presence in my house at such an unseemly hour, he did, indeed, attempt such an explanation as he has offered here; but I knew his excuse to be false on the very face of it, and told him so. I suspected, also, his real errand and told him that; I then demanded that he should give me his solemn promise never to approach my premises again, and never to see or speak to Kit Ken again, unless it was to make her his wife."

"And what did the vagabond say to that?" demanded the old squire.

"He asked me what would be the consequence of his refusal to comply with such absurd demands. I told him that I should go next day and lay the whole case before Mr. Coyle, of Caveland, and claim from him, both as the uncle of the delinquent and as Justice of the Peace for the neighborhood, protection for myself and household against the aggressions of Mr. Brandon Coyle."

"And you should have had it, my dear! You should have had it! I would have committed the scamp to the county jail if he had been twenty nephews rolled into one! Why didn't you come and complain to me, my dear! Why didn't you?"

"Because," said Net, "the man promised all that I demanded. He promised to acknowledge Kit his lawful wife within a week from that day, and under that promise he was permitted to leave my house in peace."

"And he *did* marry her?"

"He had married her long before that, or he had pretended to do so. The poor girl, who had some pride in her good name, and could not endure to lie under suspicion, confessed to me that morning her secret marriage to Mr. Brandon Coyle on the night of September ninth, the night

of the day of my dear stepfather's funeral. I remember missing her that night and receiving a lame excuse for her unusual absence. She showed me a paper that she called her 'wedding lines'—a sort of irregular certificate of marriage—the same paper that Mr. Brandon Coyle has destroyed. She also gave me many details that would have convinced any candid mind of her truth. She evidently confidently believed herself to be the lawful wife of Mr. Brandon Coyle."

"She believed nothing of the sort! She imposed on you, madame, by a tissue of artful falsehoods which your own imagination has unfortunately for truth, very much embellished!" rudely exclaimed Brandon Coyle.

"HOLD YOUR TONGUE, SIR!" vociferated the old squire, beside himself with rage and shame. "Can you not see that your cause is gone? Can you not see that not a man nor woman present believes one word you have to say? Why do you not leave the room and the house? How long do you intend to stand there heaping disgrace upon yourself and all connected with you? Leave! Begone! For decency's sake, go hang yourself!"

"Indeed, I think you had better withdraw, Mr. Brandon," said Lord Beaudevere, in a low tone.

"You are all against me! Every one of you! You are all my enemies! I am basely slandered! Foully maligned! And you believe and indorse my slanderers and maligners, or you *pretend* to do so, because you are all my bitter enemies! I have not a friend in this house to do me justice!" fiercely exclaimed the desperate villain, and like a wild beast driven to frenzy, he turned to rush from the room.

In an instant Aspirita Coyle, who had been a silent but angry spectator of the scene, arose and darted to her brother's side, exclaiming:

"Yes, Brandon! *I* am your friend! Your sister! If our friends here abandon you, they must abandon me too! If our uncle discards you, he shall lose me also! I will never re-enter the doors that refuse to receive you! I will go with you, my brother, and share your fate!"

She had poured forth all these words with impetuous passion, and now she caught his arm and turned around, facing the company with eyes blazing defiance.

"DROP THAT MAN'S ARM INSTANTLY, MISS COYLE!" thundered the old squire.

"I won't! He is my dear brother!"

"Go, my dear girl. Would you cling to a fallen pillar?" whispered Brandon, who seemed deeply touched by her fidelity at this time.

"Yes, I would. Since it is my brother! The only one I really love on earth!" replied the girl.

"OBEY ME MISS COYLE! Return to your seat this moment!" roared the old squire.

"I—will—not!" replied Aspirita, slowly and emphatically.

"Go, go, my sister!" urged the young man.

"I'll see him—*burnt* first! There!" said Aspirita.

"COME HERE THIS INSTANT, MISS COYLE! You are my niece, my ward! You must submit to me!" cried the old squire, leaving his seat.

"I tell you I won't! What is the use of your roaring?" retorted the girl. "Come, Brandon! Why are we lingering here? Let us leave the room!" she added, turning to her brother.

"Aspirita! You would but embarrass me by your presence. Dear child, I feel your devotion! It is a great comfort to me to find *one* heart faithful to mine in adversity! And when I have a home I will send for you to share it; but until that time you would but embarrass me! Go, dear! Go," whispered the young man, in eager, hurried tones.

But still she clung to him, while old Coyle chafed and sputtered, and began to look dangerous.

"Aspirita," hastily whispered Brandon, "for the next few days I shall have no fixed home. I go to hunt up evidence to vindicate my honor. And I go—*to avenge myself upon my enemies!*" he added, in a hissing tone, as his white teeth gleamed like a tiger's under his bushy black mustache.

"I will not be disgraced by both of you at the same time. If you do not obey me, and leave that villain's side instantly, Miss Coyle, I will find means to compel you to do so!" thundered the exasperated old squire, trotting towards the brother and sister, with his round face in a flame, and short, fat arm raised threateningly.

"Go! go! *Pray* go!" hastily whispered Brandon.

"ONCE MORE! For the last time! WILL you obey me?" vociferated the old man, standing before them with doubled fist.

"I will obey *my brother.* He tells me to go wtih you, and I will go. And when he shall tell me to leave you and return to him—I will do so. *I am of age*—a fact which you seem to have forgotten—and I am at liberty to do as I please. Good-bye, my dear brather! I hope soon to see you victorious over all your enemies," said Aspirita.

Brandon Coyle folded her in his arms for a moment, then released her, and with a profound, mocking bow to the assembled company, turned and left the room.

"Be good enough to see if my carriage waits," said the old man then to Adams, the footman, who stood with the other servants near the door, and who immediately left to obey the order.

Lady Arielle, now suffering from the reaction of excitement, pale and trembling, yet self-possessed and courteous, heard this order given and immediately walked down to the side of old Mr. Coyle and said:

"Will you not gratify your friends by remaining to dinner? It will be served in a few minutes."

"I couldn't eat a morsel if it was to save my life! Could you?" roughly replied the old man.

"We have already dined—'full of horrors'—Lady Altofaire," said Aspirita Coyle, with freezing politeness.

"No one can regret and *deplore* the pain I have been compelled to give more than I do myself," said Lady Arielle, with feeling.

"You could not help it, my lady! You could not help it! You must not regret or deplore anything that has happened! You should thank Heaven to be rid of the scamp on any terms!" exclaimed old Mr. Coyle.

"I think it is mean and cruel for a man's own relation to turn against him!" exclaimed Aspirita.

"I disclaim him as a relation. He is not a Coyle at all! He is the son of his father," said the old squire, bitterly. "They have both caused me grief and shame enough in my time! And *you,* Aspirita, had best keep silence on this subject! I advise you!"

The girl, hanging on his arm, turned as pale as her dark skin would permit, and became mute.

"Mr. Coyle's carriage waits," said the footman, opening the door.

"Ah! All right! Good afternoon, Lady Altofaire," said the old squire, with a bow, as he turned and led off his niece, who merely nodded to the young countess in leaving.

When the Coyles had gone, Lord Beaudevere rapped on the table, as if to call the little company to order, and then said:

"It is the desire of the Countess of Altofaire that the subjects just discussed in this room be not talked of to any one beyond these walls. Of the reticence of her friends she feels the fullest confidence. And of the people of her household she hopes the same discreet silence. The servants may now withdraw."

In obedience to this direction, the domestics, who had been called together to listen to the reading of the late lord's will, now retired—each one satisfied with, and grateful for, the legacy that had been left to him or to her, and resolved to be silent upon the subject of the sensational revelations that had been made that day, and had broken off the marriage engagement between their young lady and Mr. Brandon Coyle.

But, oh; the strong, overwhelming temptation to tell such a stunning story!

The men really resisted the temptation and kept the faith from first to last.

And the women kept the secret for a few hours; but then the cook, under an extorted promise of profound secrecy, told it to the pretty dairymaid, Hannah Horner, as a solemn warning to beware of young men who were above her in rank, for fear she might be taken in by a false marriage and spirited away like poor Kit Ken.

And the dairymaid, with mouth and eyes wide open with wonder and dismay, told the whole story to her mother, old Dame Horner, at the porter's, when she went home—for should a girl keep a secret from her own mother?

Dame Horner, who was required to make no promise on the subject, button-holed and half paralyzed the postman with the story the very first time he came through the gate.

And the postman told the tale all over the country, wherever he stopped to deliver or to gather letters.

Thus, in a few hours, the luckless love story of poor Kit Ken had reached even to the ears of her parents and brothers! And the rough men of the family were out on the warpath after Brandon Coyle.

But to return to the great dining hall where the late earl's will had been read, and the startling revelations had been made.

Soon after the withdrawal of the servants dinner was announced, and the company, reduced now to seven persons, adjourned to the small dining room, where the table had been laid, and where every one, excepting Arielle, really enjoyed the courses set before them.

Soon after dinner Arielle and Net found themselves alone for a few moments, and the former said:

"I have been wanting to ask you all day, whether you have heard from Antoinette since I saw you last."

"Yes, I had a letter this morning just before I left home. She has gone down to Deloraine Park to spend the winter. She thinks the quietness of the country and the mild air will do her good. She wants me to join her there," replied Net.

"But you will not go?"

"Not at present," said Net.

An hour later the friends were all assembled in the drawing room, where, after drinking tea, the guests were preparing to depart.

Net Fleming went up to Lady Arielle to bid her goodnight.

"Must you go? Oh, must you go so soon?" inquired the young countess, in a sorrowful tone.

"Yes, dear; you know I came with Dr. Bennet. He was kind enough to drive me here in his gig. He is going now; he has some patients to see this evening, and I must go home when he goes."

"But why return at all to-night? Why can't you stay with me for a few days? Oh! I need you so much, Net."

"Dear friend, I would be so willing to do so, but I cannot leave the children. There is no one that I dare trust them to since poor Kit has gone," gently replied Net.

"Bring them here!" quickly exclaimed the lady. "Oh, Net! close up the cottage and send home your servant, and come and bring the children with you, and stay—stay as long as ever you can—stay always, or at least until Mr. Adrian Fleming returns to take you home. Oh! *do*, Net. Say you will."

"But, my dear, shall you remain at the castle? Shall you not go to the house of your guardian, Lord Beaudevere?" inquired Net, as she drew on her black gloves.

"To Cloudland? Oh, no, no, no! Why, *he* is expected back in a few days——"

"Valdimir Desparde!" exclaimed Net, in astonishment.

"Yes. I did not tell you when I was at the Bird's Nest, I could not bear to speak of him. And I cannot go to Cloudland, where I may meet him."

"Why—when—how did you hear this?" questioned Net, in wonder.

"A letter from him to Lord Beaudevere, announcing his return to—to vindicate himself. There! do not let us speak of him!"

"But if he can vindicate himself, surely you will be glad to see him, dear Arielle?" said Net.

"Hush! How *can* he do so? His wife and child have passed from this world! Thus he is free to come back. This is his vindication! Bah! let us drop the subject! I cannot go to Cloudland; that is certain! You must come, and bring the children and stay with me here, Net."

"But children might be troublesome to you, my dear."

"What nonsense! If they should be, I could put them in a pleasant suite of apartments, half a mile away from me, in this big house! But they will not trouble me the least! Little children never do; they always cheer and comfort me! Bring them, Net. When will you bring them? When shall I send old Abraham with the old family coach for you? To-morrow? Next day? When, Net?"

"It is not very polite to interrupt a conversation between friends, but, my dear Mrs. Fleming, unless we set out very soon night will overtake us before we get through the mountain passes," said Dr. Bennet, coming up.

"Good-night, dear Arielle," murmured Net, stooping to kiss the young hostess.

"But you have not told me when I shall send the family

coach for you and the children! You shall not go until you tell me!" exclaimed the latter, clasping her friend's hand.

"On—on Saturday—Saturday afternoon," answered Net, hurriedly, as she once more kissed her hostess good-night, and left her to make other hasty adieux, not to keep her escort waiting.

"Mind! be ready to come on Saturday. I shall be sure to send the carriage with orders to bring you and the children back if it has to wait all day and all night too!" said Lady Arielle, following Net to the door.

"I will be ready, dear! Good-night," said Net, as she disappeared.

The family solicitor also took leave, and departed in his hired cab to catch the midnight express for London.

The old priest pleaded his age and infirmities and retired to his den; Lord Beaudevere and Vivienne remained in the castle over night.

And soon after the friends retired to rest.

---

## CHAPTER II

### OUR EXILE

Oh, unexpected stroke, worse than of death!
Must I then leave thee, Paradise? Thus leave
Thee, native soil, these happy walks and shades,
Fit haunt of gods? MILTON.

Yes, yes! from out the herd, like a marked deer,
They drive the poor distraught! The storms of heaven
Beat on him; gaping hinds stare at his woe;
And no one stops to pray Heaven speed his way.
BAILLIE.

WE must now take up the story of our exile, Valdimir Desparde, and briefly relate what had happened to him in the interval between that despairful day on which, self-banished, he left his native land and that hopeful one on which he embarked to return.

He took passage on the *Arizona,* that sailed from Liverpool on the third of June.

To avoid the possibility of meeting any acquaintance he took a berth in the second cabin, and secluded himself within his state-room, where, under the plea of illness, which his pale and haggard countenance verified, and by the payment of an extra stipend to the steward, he had his slender meals served him.

Only at night did he venture forth to take up a little exercise and breathe a little fresh air by pacing up and down the then forsaken and almost solitary deck.

Often, at such hours, with the lonely, starlit sky above, and the lonely, restless sea beneath, the temptation to suicide strongly beset him.

To take one plunge! To leave this world of anguish and despair and enter the other world of—*what?*

He had no fears of that other world—none whatever. So it was no craven terror that withheld him from "rushing unbidden" into the life beyond this. But he had the loyalty of a faithful soldier at his post—the loyalty that would stay and suffer until his Lord should see fit to relieve him.

It is in hours like these of fierce suffering and fiercer temptation that the power of a religious training is manifested.

And he suffered a living death in the keenly conscious loss of all he loved and valued on this earth—reputation, home, country, friends and bride! What words can portray his desolation? His very great strength to live and endure did but intensify and prolong his agony.

And still Valdimir Desparde secluded himself in his state-room during the day and walked the deck during the night. And still the woful days and sleepless nights went on, and finally brought the ship into port in the gray of the morning on the fifteenth of the month.

"She's landed, sir, and the passengers are all getting up and preparing to go on shore," said the voice of the steward, as he officiously rapped at the door of Desparde's state-room.

Valdimir Desparde arose, dressed himself, packed his valise, and came out on deck.

It was scarcely light, yet many of the passengers were

already up and dressed, and crowding to the side of the ship, where the gang-plank had been laid.

"So this is the new world! Not so very unlike the old world! And both at this hour and on this scene not unlike one of the visions in Dante's Inferno," said Desparde to himself as he gazed.

Certainly he had not seen the new world for the first time under the best auspices.

He crossed the gang-plank and stood on the crowded and noisy pier, where stevedores were already engaged in unloading the ship and piling up the freight.

A human being more lonely, more desolate, more miserable and despairing than our exile could scarcely be found on this sin and sorrow-laden earth. He had no further interest in this world—no single object to live for. He scarcely knew where next he should bend his steps. It would have been well for him then if he had been compelled to labor for his next meal; if the pangs of absolute hunger with impending famine could have driven him to occupation. But he had a thousand pounds sterling in his valise, so that wholesome necessity to work was not upon him.

There were but two possibilities he anticipated with any sort of interest—the first was the receipt of that promised letter from Brandon Coyle—"honest, *honest* Iago!"—which should give him the latest news of his beloved, his forsaken, his forever-forfeited bride! but he did not know or even ask himself whether he looked forward to this with more of desire or—despair! The other one was his visit to New Orleans and investigation of the old domestic tragedy whose discovery had ruined his life—an investigation from which he shrank with feelings of the most intense horror and repugnance, yet towards which he was forced by some occult, irresistible impulse.

He determined to wait in New York city until he should have received and answered that letter, and then to set out for that southern city on his weird errand to "open the ghastly charnel house" of that dread tragedy for what further discoveries it might reveal.

But at the present moment he scarcely knew whither to direct his steps. He thought he would hide himself for a few days, until the arrival of his letter, in some obscure

but decent public house, where no Englishmen of his rank or acquaintance would be likely to meet him.

But where to find a public house which was at once obscure and respectable was a difficult question.

While he was turning over the subject in his mind his ears were saluted by a voice of wailing—a voice of lamentation and great mourning, in the dear, familiar accents of the "North Countrie."

"Ou, ou, wae's me!" it cried; "wae's me, my bonny bairn, what sal we do, wi' naebody here to mit us! Wae's me! wae's me!"

Desparde turned and saw a young woman in the Shetland peasant's dress, short full plaid skirt, black bodice and white cap, standing amidst her bundles on the pier and holding a baby in her arms. On closer view she was a very handsome woman of the Juno type of beauty, tall, finely proportioned, full-formed, with a well-shaped head, gracefully set upon a stately neck, regular, noble features; fair, blooming complexion, with large, clear blue eyes and wavy yellow hair.

Desparde's casual glance became a fixed look, as he exclaimed, in amazement:

"Why, Annek! Annek Yok! This is never *you,* lass!"

The young woman stared at him with her wide-open, great blue orbs for a full minute before she answered:

"Indeed and it is, then, laird, just mysel' and nae ither! But is it yoursel', then, laird, that I see before my een? And is it your bridle tower, and *where is my bonny Leddy Arielle?"*

As the young woman put this question she sat down on her largest bundle to recover her breath.

Desparde, still amazed at the presence of this girl, whom he had known from her childhood as the daughter of a fisherman at Skol, and a special favorite with Lady Arielle Montjoie, did not answer her question, but put another:

"Why, how came you here, of all places in the world, Annek? Who is with you? Where are you going? What are you waiting here on the pier for?"

"Ou, sure I cam i' the ship there, by, and there's naebody wi' me, barring the bairnie, and I'm waiting for my guid mon; but he does na come! But *where's my leddy?"* inquired the girl, returning to the previous question.

"Then you are married, Annek?" said Desparde, evading the necessity of giving her a direct reply.

"Marrit, is it? Ou, ay, laird! Dinna ye see for yoursel' I am marrit?—— Bless the bairnie," exclaimed the young mother, suddenly breaking off in her discourse, and stooping to kiss her child. "Ay, laird, I'm marrit; and sure I'm thinking ye'll be marrit yoursel' and on your bridle tower, and *where is the bonnie bride?*" persisted the young woman.

"Who did you marry, Annek?"

"E'en just a guid mon and true! Ye mind Eric Lan, wha worked under the gardener at the castle?"

"Yes, I remember him—a fine young fellow."

"Weel, it is just him I marrit, eighteen months ago, come the first o' next month, laird. But where's my bonny leddy a' this time?"

"Where is your husband, Annek?"

"Eh, thin in N'yark somewhere. I writ him to mit me here, and I'm waiting for him noo. Eh! laird, but I was frighted to stand here my lane in a strange country, and naebody to mit me! But when I saw ye, laird, I kenned weel that ye'd no let ony ill come till me! Noo, then, *where's the bonny bride, laird?*"

"Did you come over in the *Arizona?*"

"Ay, sure, laird! That ship lying there, by! I cam i' the steerage, laird! Eh! but the saysickness tuk me aff my feet the first wick! And 'deed, laird, ye dinna luke that weel yourself'! Ye will ha' been saysick yoursel'. And aiblins the bonny leddy is saysick hersel' that I dinna see her! *Where is my leddy?*"

"Annek, I think you had better not sit here. The pier is very damp and the air is very unwholesome. It is not good for you or your child that you should stay here any longer," said Desparde.

"Where will I gae, then laird? Sure I'm waiting for my guid mon to come and mit me, and frighted anoo I was to be standin' my lane here in a strange country till I saw you, laird! And then I kenned I was safe, ony gait! And ye'll be on your bridle tower, laird, and where is the bonny bride?"

"Annek, my lass, since you must wait here I will not

leave you until your 'guid mon' comes," said Desparde, taking his seat on a deal box at her side. "So now you may employ the time in telling me about your marriage and your emigration to this country."

"Ay, that I will, laird! Eric and me were troth-plighted lang sine, but we didna think to get marrit sae sune, but ye maun ken, laird, that my puir auld feyther got drooned in a squall, when he was awa in the boat——"

"Your father was drowned! I am very sorry to hear it, my poor Annek."

"Ou, ay! It waur the fishermon's risk and the fishermon's fate, laird, but the auld mither was puirly, laird, and she took it sae sare to hairt that wi' the cough and wi' the sorrow she pined awa' and deed, and I was left my lane."

"My poor, dear lass!" exclaimed Desparde, for the moment forgetting his own sorrows in those of the girl.

"Ou, ay, it was waefu'! And ye ken, laird, the Word says it is na guid for mon to be alane, and sure nae mair is it guid for a puir lass to live alane in her sheeling when the feyther and the mither hae gone till their Heavenly hame."

"I am sure it could not have been," assented Desparde.

"Sae ye ken, laird. Eric cam' and took me before the priest, and we were marrit and cum hame to live i' the auld sheeling thegither, and we gaed on weel enoo for the first year, laird; but then the bairn cam and took a' Eric's savings, and the wark give oot i' the gairden, and as ye ken, laird, there's nae muckle chance o' making a living at Skol, ance fortune taks a turn agen ane."

"I know," said Desparde, sympathetically.

"Eh, but we struggled haird to live before we pairted; but at lang last my puir lad said he had better gang while he could; so he left the lave of his bit money wi' me and got a cast in a fisher's boat ower to Dunross, and then he trampped doon to Glasgow and shipped as a seaman for the voyage to N'yark."

"Ay?" said Desparde, seeing that she had paused for breath.

"Ay, laird, and it was months before I heard of him. Then cam a letter wi' guid news. He had got wark on the public roads at a dollar and seventy-five cents a day, wilk be seven shillings of our money, and as muckle as

he could mak in a week at hame—and he said as sune as he could save enough for my passage out wi' the bairn he would send me the money in a bill o' changes—whilk he did, laird, about four wicks sin', and ye may weel believe I didna let the grass grow under my feet till I got the eight go'den guineas for that bill o' changes. Eh, the beauties! I hardly thought the airl at the castle himsel' had sae muckle money as that luked like. Eh, but it cost wan o' the beauties to tak me to Liverpool, and sax to buy my ticket in yon pig-sty of a steerage, and noo I hae got but wan beauty left."

"Did your husband know that you would come by the *Arizona?*"

"Ou, ay! The priest writ til him, for me, to mit me at the landing whin the ship got in, and it's him I'm waiting for noo."

"But, my good girl, the ocean steamers, which are so regular on their day of sailing, are by no means certain in their days of arrival. Your good man may not know that the Arizona is in. A man cannot *live* on the pier waiting for a ship, you know. And *you* are staying too long here for your good. Don't you know where in this great city your husband lodges? If you do, I could take you to his place," said Desparde, kindly.

"Eh, laird! would ye tak sae muckle trouble? 'Deed I was i' the right nae to be frighted langer when I seed ye, laird!" exclaimed Annek, with grateful glee.

"Then let me have Eric's address," said Valdimir.

"Is it where he lodges?"

"Yes, where he lodges?"

"It will be on the bit letter. Here! I hae keepit it neist my hairt a' this time," said the young woman, drawing out a large, clumsy document from the bosom of her dress and handing it to Desparde.

He unfolded the letter and turned at once to the front page.

"One hundred and—something Mercer street. I cannot make out the two last figures, but no doubt we can find the house," said the young gentleman.

"Where will Mercy street be, then, laird?" inquired Annek.

"I do not know. I will call a cab and put you into it,

and direct the driver to take us there. We can store your traps until you can send for them."

"Vera well, laird," said the young woman, with a grateful courtesy.

Desparde beckoned a porter with a handcart, and engaged him to carry Annek's goods and chattels to a warehouse and store them, and then to send a cab.

Fifteen minutes later Desparde placed Annek and her child in a hack and took his seat by her side, after directing the driver to go to Mercer street.

As the hack rolled off it was watched by two wharf loafers, who were leaning up against a pile of boxes and smoking short pipes.

"If that young gent isn't Valdimir Desparde, then he's his double, that's all," said one.

"Who? He that has gone off in the hack with that handsome young Irishwoman he's been talking to?" inquired the other.

"Yes; but she's not Irish—she's Scotch. Didn't you hear her talk?"

"Not I. I was looking at her, not listening to her. By Jove! what a handsome creature she is! Is she his wife, do you think?"

"If she is, it is a runaway match, and that *is* why they have come out here."

"You knew them in the old country, then!"

"I knew *him!* I should rather think I did! My father is bailiff of the Honeythorn estate in his neighborhood."

"Is he a gentleman, then?"

"Rather! he is the heir of a title and estate."

"And you think he has ran away with and married—*that girl?* WHEW!!"

## CHAPTER III

### A SHOCK

Heart-rending news and dreadful to those few
Who her resemble and her steps pursue;
That death should license have to rage among
The good, the strong, the loving, and the young.
WALLER.

Faith builds a bridge across the gulf of death,
To break the shock blind nature cannot shun,
And lands thought smoothly on the other shore.
YOUNG.

WHILE this conversation was going on between the two loiterers on the pier, the unconscious objects of their comments were driving rapidly towards Mercer street.

Arrived at that unsavory thoroughfare, the horses slackened speed, while the driver began to scan the figures over each door.

They drove very slowly, and by dint of questioning policemen and comparing notes over the hieroglyphic figures in the address at the head of poor Eric's letter, they were at length directed to a large, three-storied brick building in a rather dilapidated condition, occupied as a boarding-house and patronied principally by Scotch laborers.

Here the carriage drew up and Desparde offered to get out and make inquiries.

"Na, na, laird, let me gae too! D'ye think I can stay behint a minute and my ain guid mon i' the hoose? Na, na, I'll gae wi' you!" exclaimed Annek, hurrying from the carriage and joining Desparde as he walked up the rickety front steps between the half dozen ragged boys and girls that roosted thereon.

"Does Eric Lan live here?" inquired Desparde of the oldest child, a bright-looking girl of about twelve years of age.

"Eric Lan?" echoed the girl, with sudden gravity clouding over her sunny face.

"Yes! Eric Lan! Does he live here?"

"Na, he's deed!" said the girl, solemnly.

"He's deed!" echoed the other children, gathering around the inquirer.

"What—what do they say?" faltered Annek, clutching the coat of Desparde with one hand while she clasped her child with the other.

"Heaven help us, I don't knaw what they say."

"He's deed! he's deed! and they put him i' the Potter's Field," repeated the children, with addition.

"Ou, laird! laird! It is na true! It was na him! It was another mon! He could na dee, ye ken, he was sae tall and strong! He could na dee and me coming out till him!" gasped poor Annek, clinging to her child with one arm and to the coat of her only friend with the other.

"My poor girl! Here comes the landlady, I think. She will tell us," said Desparde, kindly.

"Wha are ye speering for?" inquired a stout and florid dame of about fifty years, as she came up to the door, wiping her large red hands on a dingy white apron.

"Eric Lan. Can you tell us——" began Desparde, but the landlady cut him short with an exclamation.

"Eric Lan! Gude guide us! Eric Lan is deed! He deed, puir mon—— Hech, lass! Dinna drap the bairn! Luik till her, sir!" exclaimed the landlady, breaking off from her story and catching the baby from the failing hands of the young mother.

"She was his wife," said Desparde, as he supported her head upon his shoulder and looked around for some chair or sofa upon which to lay her.

"Eh! puir young thing! I kenned he expectit her. It's hard. It's unco hard. Bring her intil the house, sir," said the landlady, leading the way to a room on the same floor, wherein was a bed.

"Lay her doon here, sir, and I'll fetch something to bring her to," said the woman.

But poor Annek had not swooned. She had lost power, but not consciousness.

"Na, na," she gasped. "I will no lay doon. Sit me here, laird," she said, as she left his hold and tottered and dropped into a dilapidated old easy chair.

Desparde stood over it watching her.

The landlady came in with the baby in her left arm, and half a glass of whiskey in her right hand.

"Here , tak this, lass. It will pit some life intil ye. It's rale guid whiskey," she said, putting the glass to Annek's lips.

The poor girl took a swallow, that in its turn took her breath. And then she said:

"Tell me a'. When did my Eric dee?" And then she suddenly broke down and burst into a passion of tears and sobs, swinging herself back and forth, and crying between her gasps and catches:

"Ou, my Eric! my Eric! Why did ye iver gae and leave me? Ou, why did ye dee and leave me? Why did ye no tak me wi' ye? Ou, my Eric! my ain lad! Wad I hae deed wi' ye, my Eric!"

And so she continued, rocking her body to and fro, sobbing, weeping, crying and exclaiming after the noisy manner of her kind.

Meanwhile the poor baby began to wail and fret, and the kindly Scotchwoman walked it up and down the floor to quiet it, and finally carried it out of the room to feed it and put it to sleep.

Valdimir Desparde could not find it in his heart to leave the poor afflicted young creature before him. He had known her from the time she was a little, toddling, barefooted bairn in her father's cot at Skol. He had seen her nearly every summer while spending the heated term with the Earl and Countess of Altofaire and Lady Arielle Montjoie at Skol. He had seen her grow from childhood to womanhood under the eyes of her venerable lord and lady. He had known her ill-fated husband almost as long and as well as he had known herself. Now he deeply sympathized with her, and he resolved to do all that in him lay to soothe her sorrow and relieve her wants.

He watched her violent paroxysm of grief in silent sympathy for awhile, hoping that it would in due time exhaust itself. But seeing no sign of its abatement he could defer his efforts at consolation no longer.

He drew his chair to her side, took her hand in his, and whispered:

"I wish you to look upon me as a brother, lass. Do not think yourself a friendless stranger in a strange land, for

I will be a friend to you, Annek. I will send you back to Skol by the next steamer, if you wish to go. I will send you in the second cabin, so that you will be perfectly safe and comfortable. I will not leave you, Annek, until I have provided for your safety and comfort"

Excessive grief is often very ungrateful, bitterly resenting all expressions of sympathy, and rudely repulsing all offers of service.

"I dinna want any friends. I want my Eric! Ou, my Eric! Ou, my ain Eric!" cried the girl, snatching her hand from Desparde's kindly clasp, and bursting into more violent sobs and more copious tears.

"Would you like to go back to Skol by the next steamer, Annek?" gently inquired Desparde.

"Na, na, I dinna want to gang onywhere on this earth! I want to dee! I want to dee! I want to dee and gae to my own Eric!" she cried, amid violent gasps that seemed to rend her bosom.

The Scotch landlady now appeared at the dor, with the sleeping baby in her arms; but hearing the uproar of Annek's lamentations, and fearing it would awake the sleeper, she turned and took it away again to lay on some quieter bed.

And then she returned to the room, and going up to the wailing woman began to essay her plain, commonplace method of consolation.

"Coom, coom, noo, lass! Ye mauna greet sae sair! Ye will be making yoursel' ill! Hout noo, ye mauna be fleein' i' the face o' Providence that gait! Sure, lass, we hae a' got to dee ane time or anither, and weel it is for them that are prepared!"

"I wish I was deed mysel'! I wish we were *a'* deed! I do! I do!" cried the wild creature, wringing her strong young hands as if she would have wrung the flesh off their bones.

"Hout, woman, we are na ready to dee. I ken well enoo that I am na. Eh, but we'll a' gae when our time coomes, na fear o' that! But stap greeting! 'Deed and ye'll mak' yoursel' ill."

"Let me alane! I want to be ill? I want to dee! I want to gae to my Eric! Ou, my ain Eric! Ou, my ain Eric!"

And here she writhed in an accession of convulsive agony that terrified the good Scotchwoman, who would have again attempted to soothe her had not Desparde interfered.

"Best not to notice her. This paroxysm must exhaust itself sooner or later. Come with me out into the passage and tell me how this strong young man came to die," he whispered, as he led the way froh the room.

"You know him, then, sir?" said the Scotchwoman, as she stood by his side in the passage.

"Yes, from childhood I knew them both. They were both born and brought up on the estate of a dear friend," replied Desparde.

"My Laird Allfair?" put in the Scotchwoman.

"Altofaire. Yes. I suppose poor Eric spoke of his feudal lord," said Desparde, with a sad smile.

"Ay, he did, puir lad!"

"Now what was his trouble?" inquired Desparde.

"Ou, just the fever, sir! The tie-foot fever they ca' it here; though why they do, or what it has to wi' feet, I dinna ken!"

"Was he ill long?"

"Aboot ten days in his bed, sir. He was ta'en doon two days after he had sent the money to the puir lass to coom oot till him—though I'm thinking he had been no that weel for some time before. Eh, sir, he told me it would be a month before he could see her; but he counted off the days as they passed until he got so ill as to lose his mind, and then, sir, gin you will believe me, he thought she was *with* him, and he talked to her, off and on, quiet and loving, till he deed. Eh, it waur pitiful!" said the woman, putting up her apron to her eyes.

"Poor fellow! Did he leave any money or effects that might benefit his widow?" inquired the young gentleman.

"Nay, sir; naugh but a few bits o' claithes. Certain he had sent every dollar he could rake and scrape to the lass to bring her over, depending on getting more every day, for he had constant wark at guid wage; but ye ken he waur took doon and deed in about ten days. We behoved to bury his body i' the Potter's Field, puir mon! Has the puir lass ony siller o' her ain, sir, do ye ken?"

"I think only a sovereign—about five dollars."

"Eh, puir bodie! What will she do?" exclaimed the landlady.

"I will provide for her and her child until they return to their country and friends," quietly replied Desparde, unconsciously adding to the structure of circumstantial evidence against himself.

"Eh, sir, that will be unco generous o' you."

"Can you accommodate them here until some arrangements can be made to send them home?" then inquired Desparde, drawing his portemonnaie from his breast pocket.

"Ou, ay, sir, sure! She can hae her puir guid mon's little room, which is vacant, noo," replied the woman.

"I find I have only English money here. I had forgotten," said Desparde. "But in the course of the day I shall change it, and then will pay you in advance."

"Had we no better ask the lass if she be willing to bide wi' me, sir?" questioned the woman.

"We had better return to her, at any rate, lest she should think herself deserted," replied Desparde, as he walked back into the room where Annek now sat, quiet with the prostration and stupor of grief.

"Annek," he said, "are you willing to stay here with this kind woman until you get better, and some arrangements can be made for sending you back to Skol?"

"I dinna care whaur I bide, or what becomes o' me," muttered the girl.

"Then you will stay here for the present?"

"I dinna care."

"She will stay, sir," said the woman.

"Then I will go and send her effects. Like many of the emigrants who come over in the steerage, she has brought a quantity of bundles," said Desparde.

And soon after he left the house, entered his hack, drove to a broker's office, changed his English sovereigns for American dollars, and then drove to the warehouse where Annek's little property had been stored, paid charges and dispatched it to Mercer street.

It was now near noon; Desparde had not breakfasted, and, for the first time since he had received that fatal revelation which had broken off his marriage and ruined his life, Desparde began to feel very hungry. For the last three weeks he had swallowed a little food every day, not

because he felt the least inclination to eat, but truly from conscientious motives to keep life in him and not to be guilty of suicide.

But this morning he had not thought of his own woes for several consecutive hours, during which he had been walking and driving about, actively engaged in the sympathetic service of others, and now he wanted his breakfast, and he stepped into the first respectable-looking restaurant he saw and got it.

After this he drove to Mercer street again to pay the board of his protégées in advance, as he promised the landlady to do.

He found Annek still sitting in the room where he had left her, quiet and sullen with grief. Now, however, she had her baby in her arms and her bundles on the floor around her.

"They hae just come, sir, and I hae na had time to put them awa. She canna do aught for hersel', ye ken, sir. She is just dazed like still, and no wonder, puir bodie!" said the landlady, in explanation.

Desparde called the woman aside and put two ten-dollar bills in her hand on account, and took a receipt from which he learned for the first time that the landlady's name was Jane Donald.

"Mrs. Donald, your landlady here, will do everything in her power to make you comfortable, my poor girl, and I shall not leave New York until I have made arrangements for your future."

"An ye could on'y send me and my bairnie after puir Eric, it's the gait I would like to gang," said Annek.

"What is your child's name Annek?" inquired Desparde, with the kindly thought of occupying her with talk about the babe.

"What suld it be but Eric, sir, for the daddie o' him?"

"Oh! it is a boy, then?"

"Of course it is. Would I be calling a lass Eric- What's come till ye, laird, to be speering such a question?"

"Dinna be crass, noo. The gentleman's a guid freend till ye, lsas," put in Mrs. Donald.

"I dinna want ony freends," sullenly replied the girl.

"Dinna mind her, sir! she is a bit daft wi' her troubles," observed the landlady.

Desparde again committed the unhappy young widow to the care of Mrs. Donald, and left the house to find a lodging for himself.

He had lived, so to speak, in his hack all day. His valise and other small movables were in there. Now the day was drawing to a close, and he determined to seek rest. But first he drove to the general postoffice, in the very slight hope that he might find there a letter from Brandon Coyle that might possibly, even though sent a day or two later than the day of his own embarkation, have arrived by a faster sailing steamer. He was disappointed, however; there was no letter in the *post restante* for *"Jonathan Adams,"* the *alias* he had left with Brandon Coyle.

Then Desparde drove to a quiet, respectable hotel in a retired street, where he registered his name as Jonathan Adams, and engaged a room.

Already the reaction was at hand. The spirits of anguish and despair, that had been exorcised for a brief season by the angel of benevolence, now took possession of his soul with a hundred-fold power to torment and destroy.

Under their full influence he retired to his room and wrote that dark and desperate letter to Brandon Coyle that has been recorded elsewhere.

He rang for a waiter, and sent the letter to be posted and then locked himself in and spent the dreadful night in walking up and down the floor, until near morning, when he threw himself, exhausted, on the outside of his bed and slept until late in the forenoon.

His first care that day was to go to the postoffice where he found a letter from Brandon Coyle waiting for him. He could not wait to get back to his hotel before reading it. He went up to an unoccupied window in the lobby and opened the envelope and read the letter with devouring interest.

Brandon Coyle had described the scenes that had followed the flight of Valdimir Desparde, with a mixture of most artful truth and falsehood, calculated to utterly discourage the exile from ever dreaming of return. He had portrayed the condition of Lady Arielle Montjoie very plausibly, describing her as overwhelmed by his departure, but as having successfully rallied from the shock, until

*then,* at the date of the letter, she seemed quité herself again.

"In three days! To forget me in three days! It is impossible! She puts it on! For the sake of her aged grandparents, she assumes a gayety she does not feel! I am sure of it! *I know her heart!* Yet, oh, my lost love! ought I not to hope and pray that this letter speaks the truth, that you have forgotten me! But I am human! I am human! And therefore I am selfish!" inwardly moaned the unhappy man, as he thrust the letter in his pocket and left the post-office.

His own woes did not cause him to forget his poor protégées in Mercer street. He turned his steps thither and found Mrs. Donald busy setting the dinner table for her boarders.

Neither Annek nor her child were visible. When Desparde inquired for them, Mrs. Donald replied that they were lying on the bed upstairs, adding:

"The puir lass is vera weak fra sae muckle grieving, sir; and I bid her rest, but I'll call her doon and ye wish."

"No, no, I would not disturb her. I only wish to know from her when she would return to her own country, so that I may engage her passage back," replied Desparde.

"Eh, sir! she will not hear o' gaeing back. I sat wi' her a bit last night, after she had gane to bed, and tried to comfort her wi' telling her how ye would send her hame to her people; but she winna hear of it."

"But why, for Heaven's sake?"

"Eh, then, sir, she says she hae na people of her *ain* in the auld countrie. They are a' deed, she says, and the neebor folks there be too poor to help her. She'll na gae back to starve, she says."

"Then what on earth *does* she wish to do?" inquired Desparde.

"She tells me she hae two brithers out by yonder in New Orleans, an' she wants to gae to them, if she can sell her bedding and ither plenishing for enoo money to take her there."

"To *New Orleans,* did you say?" inquired Desparde in surprise.

"Au, ay, sir, just to New Orleans, wha she hae two brithers i' the tobacco trade, weel-to-do, forehanded men. I

think mysel' it is the best thing she can do, sir, an ye wouldn't mind sending her there instead of to Scotland."

"How very strange. I am going to New Orleans, and I will gladly take charge of the poor woman and child, and see them safe in their kinsmen's home. I hope she will be able to start in a day or two. Tell her this, if you please, Mrs. Donald."

"Ay, that I will, sir, and the message will carry gladness to the widow's heart, an' she'll be ready, sir, na fear o' that!" replied the kindly Scotchwoman.

And Valdimir Desparde left the house to make preparations to go to New Orleans, incumbered by a young woman and child, and thus to add another ton to the weight of circumstantial evidence that was eventually destined to crush all his hopes.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE WANDERER

What exile from himself can flee!
  The zones, though more and more remote,
Still, still pursue, where'er I bee,
  The blight of life, the curse of thought.

BYRON.

I depart.
Whither I know not; but the hour's gone by
When lessening or nearing shores could grieve or glad mine eye.

BYRON.

THERE was nothing now to detain Valdimir Desparde in New York, whence the restlessness of misery urged him to move.

From Mercer street he went back to his hotel, wrote a hasty letter to his "friend," Brandon Coyle, instructing him to address his next communication to Jonathan Adams, General Postoffice, New Orleans, posted it and then packed his valise for his journey.

Later in the day he went again to the house of Mrs. Donald, and on this second visit he was so fortunate as to

see Annek, whom the prospect of starting immediately to her brethren had inspired with new life.

The young woman had somewhat recovered from the shock of her bereavement, and she seemed less sullen, despairing and ungrateful.

She expressed herself ready and eager to proceed on her journey, at any hour, by land or by water, as the kind "laird" deemed best.

"The steamer *Creole* leaves at six o'clock this evening for New Orleans. We will take passage by her, if you like," said the young gentleman, kindly.

"Sure and I would rather, laird, an you please," she said.

And thus it was arranged.

A dray was engaged to take Annek's effects down to the boat, where Mr. Desparde agreed to meet her an hour before the ship was to sail.

Meanwhile he went down to the office of the steamer and engaged a comfortable berth in the ladies' cabin for the woman and child, and a state-room in the saloon for himself.

At the appointed hour he met her on the boat, and gave the stewardess an extra fee to take her to her berth, and to make her comfortable during the voyage.

Annek had invested a part of the money advanced to Mrs. Donald for her use in buying a decent mourning outfit, and had changed her picturesque Skol costume of scarlet skirt, black jacket, and gray plaid, for a sombre widow's suit of black serge gown and sack, and black crepe bonnet.

This effected a perfect transformation in the young woman's appearance.

As soon as he had provided for the comfort of his poor protégée, Valdimir Desparde lighted a cigar and walked aft, to stand and watch the receding piers of the city as the boat steamed off from her pier.

Annek did not reappear on deck that evening. He saw no more of her until they met at supper in the saloon, where it happened that they sat on the same side, but at opposite ends of the table. And these seats they kept during the whole of the voyage.

After supper the young woman returned to the cabin and Mr. Desparde to the deck without their having exchanged a word together.

And as the same circumstances happened at every meal, it followed, of course, that these compatriots and fellow-passengers saw very little of each other until the end of the voyage.

The *Creole* arrived at New Orleans on the morning of the seventh day out.

Mr. Desparde was early on deck watching for the appearance of Annek.

The young woman came up at last, with her baby on one arm and a big basket on the other.

"Good-morning, Annek. Here we are. Most of our fellow-passengers have gone on shore, but you can get breakfast on board if you choose, and I would advise you to do so, while I go out and find your people. Tell me again their names and their places of business," said the young man, as he joined the girl.

"Ou, you winna leave me my lane on the boat, laird? I suld be sae sair frighted to be left my lane!" she objected.

"Oh, come now, my good Annek, you were not frightened to cross the ocean alone, why should you be afraid to stay here for an hour while I go and look up your friends?" he remonstrated.

"Will you coom back sune, laird?"

"Yes, just as soon as possible. Tell me the names of your brothers, and where they live."

"Ou, it's just Alek Yok and Jans Yok, and they are i' the tobacco trade."

"Yes," said the young man, taking notebook and pencil from his pocket and writing down these names; "but now for their places of business."

"Eh! sure it's here—i' this city—N' Orleans they bide."

"But New Orleans is a great city, my girl. I want you to tell me the street they live on."

"The street, is it? Ou, thin, I dinna ken the street. Ou, wae's me an' I suldna find my brithers after a'!" exclaimed the young woman, in dismay.

"Don't be frightened. If you do not know their address I have only to look in a city directory to find it out. There, go get your breakfast, and then stay down in the cabin with the stewardess, and do not leave the boat, on any pretext whatever, until I return for you."

"Ay, laird; but will ye be sure to coom back?" inquired the girl, in some trouble.

"Why, of course. Here, you see, Annek, I will leave my valise with you as a pledge," said Desparde, smiling at the thought of having to give security for his good faith to this peasant woman from the Shetlands.

"Er! then, I dinna want your bag, laird. It is na that. It's fearsome I am to lose sight of you," said Annek, feeling a little ashamed of herself for her injurious doubt.

Nevertheless Desparde left his valise in her charge, as much for his own convenience as for her satisfaction.

Then he went on shore and walked into the city, and stopped at the first drug store he came to for the purpose of consulting a directory. There he found what he sought:

A. & J. Yok, tobacconists, 7 Leroy Place.

Turning to the street directory he found that Leroy Place was at the other end of the city—three miles off.

He thanked the obliging druggist who had let him consult the directory, and went out to get a hack. He was fortunate in seeing an empty one passing the door.

He hailed it, jumped in, gave the order to Leroy Place and was soon bowling through the principal streets of the city out towards the obscure suburb honored by the Messrs. Yok's enterprise.

A half hour's rapid ride brought him to Leroy Place, a locality that, like "Royal Hotels" and "Imperial Saloons," sadly bewrayed its regal name. It was a short and narrow street of small shops and humble tenement houses.

About half way down the street, on the right hand as the hack approached, stood the little two-story red brick house occupied by the brothers Yok as a shop and a dwelling. The figure of a Highlander usurped the place usually occupied by the Indian chief.

Here the hack drew up, and Desparde alighted and walked into the shop.

A tall, raw-boned, red-bearded lad "o' the land o' cakes" stood behind the counter.

"What will ye hae, sir?" inquired this canny Scot, seeing that the stranger gave no order.

"Is Mr. Alek or Jan Yok in?" asked Desparde.

"I am maister Jan, at your bidding, sir."

"I have brought you news of your sister," said Desparde.

Jan Yok was interested in a moment.

"Sit ye doon, sir, an you please," he said, handing a chair over the counter, of which Desparde immediately availed himself. "Of Ann'k, sir? The lass was married when we haired frae her last—that will be sune after the feyther and mither wint to their rest, Gude keep 'em!—about two years sin'! And hoo is Ann'k an it please you, sir?"

"She is well; but I have sad news to tell of her," replied Desparde.

"Ou, ay, it wull tak na Solomon to tell what that wull be! It wull be the auld, auld story! She wull be suffering frae want! I kenned it! I kenned it! When I haird the auld fowks had gane, I wrote for her to coom oot till us and we would tak' care of her; but she had married her lad, and noo they are a' in want! I kenned it, sir. I kenned it! But wha be you, sir, an you please, wha tak sae muckle interest intil the lass?"

"I am one who was an intimate friend of the Earl of Altofaire and a frequent guest at Castle Skol, and knew Annek from her childhood," evasively answered Desparde, who did not choose to give his real name, and did not wish to give a false one there.

"Eh, then, you kenned the auld pleece?" exclaimed the Scot, his healthy red face in its frame of red hair and beard lighting up with joy at the sight of one who knew "the auld pleece."

"Yes, but I must tell you of your sister. Her case is not just what you suppose, or rather I fear it is much worse. Are we liable to interruption?"

"Na, not sae muckle at this hour. What's amiss wi' Annek, sin' she is well and nae in want?"

"I will tell you," said Desparde. And he began, and as briefly as possible he told the short, sad story of Annek's marriage, maternity, widowhood, emigration to New York, and voyage to New Orleans.

The brother listened with deep interest and sympathy.

"Eh, puir lass! puir lass! sae young to be burthened wi' a bairn, and widowed in a foreign land; though for the

matter o' that, it is better for her to be here, sir—muckle better! But what wad she hae dune an she had na found a guid freend in you, sir?"

"I was glad to be of some service to the poor girl," quietly replied the young gentleman.

"And she will be on board the *Creole* waiting for us noo, sir?"

"Yes, she is in the care of the stewardess, who seems to be a good woman. I have a carriage at the door, and will take you or any member of the family you would like to send."

"I will go, sir, as soon as my brother, Alek, cooms to tak my pleece," said Jan, turning to attend a customer—an old woman who came for a cent's worth of snuff.

"Where is your brother?" at length inquired Valdimir.

"At breakfast, doon in the kitchen, and a long time he is taking over it. I'll just step to the head of the stairs and call him," said Jan, leaving the shop by a side door, and shouting:

"Alek! Alek! Coom here! Here's grawnd news frae hame!"

A sound of many rushing footsteps was heard, and a crowd, headed by another tall, raw-boned, high-cheeked, florid-faced and red-bearded Skolman, came rushing after Jan into the shop. These were Alek Yok, his wife Sona, and his four red-haired lads, of ages ranging from nine to thirteen.

"Wull, what is it, then?" inquired Alek.

"This gentleman brings us news of Annek; her guid mon is gane, and she hae coom acrass the seas till us. She will be at the steamboat landing noo, waiting for ane of us to go and fetch her!" said Jan, putting the story of his sister in a nutshell.

A chorus of exclamations and a crowd of questions demanded details, but Jan cut them all short by saying:

"An ye'll gae behint the coonter and mind shop, Alek, I'll get me a cup av coffee and pit an ait cake in my pocket, and gae along wi' this gentleman to fetch her."

And without waiting for an answer he hurried downstairs, where he dispatched his morning draught so quickly that he returned to the shop in three minutes and announced himself ready to go with the gentleman.

They entered the hack, and were driven rapidly back to the steamboat, where they found Annek sitting in the midst of her luggage, with her baby in her arms.

There was not much of a scene. The natives of Skol are not so demonstrative as some of their neighbors.

Jan took her hand and said:

"Hoo is it wi' ye, lass?" and kissed her quietly.

Annek cried a little. Then the attention of both was drawn to the baby.

"Dinna greet, lass. I'm no marrit mysel' and forehanded, wi' naebody depending upon' me, sae I can be a feythey to the bairn. Eh! he'll find kinsmen eno' wi' us! Four braw lads as ever ye set een on, Ann'k, forby the brither and the guid wife. Eh! we are unco gled to welcome ye, lass."

With these and other words of affection Jan cheered his sister, and soon arranged for the transport of her effects to her new home.

"We a' leeve thegither, ye ken lass, but there's room eno' and to spare for yoursel' and the bairn. And hoo did ye lave the guid fowk at haime, Annek?"

So chatting, the brother put the sister and her child on a spring wagon laden with her luggage and prepared to start with her for Leroy Place.

On taking leave of her benefactor, Annek had the grace to thank "the laird" for his protection of her.

As they drove slowly off between piles of freight on the pier, Desparde heard this question and answer between the brother and sister.

"Wha's yon gentleman, ony gait? De'il hae me if I know his neeme yet!"

"Ooo, I dinna ken. We ay called him 'the laird.' He will be ane of the Montjoies, I'm thinking. He was alang o' the auld airl at the castle."

And they drove out of hearing.

Desparde, who had not yet dismissed his carriage, now re-entered it and ordered the driver to take him to the St. Boniface Hotel, where he registered his name as Jonathan Adams, New York, engaged a room and ordered breakfast.

This dispatched, he walked out on his first investigation around the city. In that crowded metropolis, where he

knew no living creature except the poor woman and child whom chance had made his fellow-passengers, and her humble relatives from whom he had just now parted, a feeling of unutterable loneliness, desolation and home-sickness came over him. An impulse to hurry back to his native country as fast as steam could take him, and see his friends again at any cost to his pride or his principles, tempted him so sorely as to rouse his soul into a tumult; his only remedy was to throw himself into some active employment that should absorb all his thoughts. The very errand that had brought him to the Crescent City—the desire to investigate his hidden family history, with all the details of the ghastly tragedy that had ruined his life, morbid as that desire was, furnished the employment he sought.

He determined to begin his investigation that very day, by going to all the public libraries, where files of newspapers were kept, and looking over those of that fatal month and year in which the crime was committed and expiated.

He first purchased a city directory to have constantly at hand, to find the places he desired to visit.

Instructed by that guide he went to the Blankonian Library, the largest as well as the oldest in the city. There he asked of the assistant librarian the privilege of examining the files of city papers for the month of July in the year 18—.

He was conducted by a clerk to the alcove where they were preserved and then left to his search.

Ah! too soon for his peace he came to a copy of the same paper that had been shown him by Brandon Coyle on that fatal day of his flight.

There again he recognized the ghastly headlines the first sight of which had stricken him down insensible and unconscious as the fabled head of Gorgon was said to have slain her beholder:

"THE EXECUTION OF THE QUADROON SLAVE. VALDIMIR DESPARDE, FOR THE MURDER OF HIS MASTER."

On this occasion he nerved himself to read the whole revolting narrative from beginning to end—and even the supplementary remarks by the editor, adding that a manuscript confession, containing the wonderful history of this "incarnate fiend's" career of crime in the United States,

in Canada, and in the West Indies, was in the hands of his spiritual director and would be immediately given in pamphlet form to the public.

While reading all the details of the last day on earth and the execution of the great criminal, a subtle doubt, like a first gleam of light striking into a dungeon, or a first ray of hope rising upon a soul overwhelmed in despair, entered the mind of Valdimir Desparde—a doubt whether the demon who bore his family name was really a member of his family at all.

True, all the circumstances pointed to the hanged felon as the father of Valdimir and Vivienne. These circumstances have been related in a former chapter and need not be recapitulated here—they were overwhelming—convincing; they had driven our unhappy young exile from his home, his country, his friends, and his promised bride.

But now that he read the story of the crime and the execution in detail, there was a subtile something running through the narrative that seemed to contradict them, conclusive as they were.

"These are facts, *facts*," said Valdimir Desparde to himself, "but I divine the possibility of a truth, a key that may explain them all away. If I could only get hold of that confession said to contain the true autobiography of the man."

He turned to the papers immediately following the one containing the account of the execution, and there again he found a clew to what he sought. It was in the advertising column of new publications, and it read as follows, in sensational type and notes of admiration:

"Ready! Ready!! Ready!!! The Wonderful Life and Adventures of John Sims, the Quadroon Slave, alias Valdimir Desparde, Gentleman, who was Executed for the Murder of his Master. With a Portrait."

"*'John Sims?'*" murmured the young gentleman to himself, as the doubt born of his first reading grew into large proportions. "'John Sims?' Was that the man's name? And was the other only an alias! If so, how came he by it? And under which name did he marry—our—— Heaven! I cannot believe it! I must find that confession and learn the whole truth, or I shall go mad. This doubt is worse than any certainty."

With the paper in his hands, he went again to the librarian, and pointing to the advertised pamphlet, he inquired:

"Is there a copy of *this* in your collection?"

The polite librarian took the paper, glanced at the title of the work indicated, and then raised his eyes in simple wonder to the refined and intellectual face of the gentleman who had called for such a rank specimen of the literature of the gutter, and replied:

"*That!* Certainly not, sir! We do not lumber our shelves with such very objectionable garbage as that!"

"I beg your pardon," said Valdimir Desparde, flushing and turning away, fully conscious of the false step he had taken, the offense he had given in asking for such a work in so select a library—the possibility of which he had forgotten in the eagerness of his pursuit.

"He is some 'Variety' playwright, I presume, looking for sensational material," said the librarian. Then feeling some compunction for the severity of his speech to the stranger, he spoke up and said:

"I think the most likely places where to procure the work you want, sir, will be the second-hand book stores and the old book stands, of which you may find any number scattered throughout the city."

"I thank you, sir," replied young Desparde, with a courteous bow; and then, having replaced the files of newspapers in their places, he left the library with the intention of following the librarian's advice.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SEARCH

They who have never warred with misery,
  Nor ever tugged with fortune and distress,
Hath had n' occasion nor a field to try
  The strength and forces of his worthiness;
Those parts of judgment which felicity
  Keeps as concealed, afflictions must express,
And only men show their abilities,
And what they are, in their extremities.

DANIEL.

THE next few days were spent by Valdimir Desparde in hunting the old book stands and second-hand book stores of the city, at every one of which he inquired for the pamphlet he so much desired to procure; but in vain.

Many of the venders of literary litter had never even heard of the work in question, or the man whose career it professed to relate; others, upon taxing their memories, were enabled to recollect having heard of the execution, but it was so long ago—so many men had been hanged since then—that the tragedy had nearly faded from their minds.

Then Desparde offered to each one of these dealers in old books a large price for a copy of the pamphlet, if they should be so fortunate as to find one in any of the collections they were in the habit of purchasing, either at auction or at private sales, and all promised to be on the lookout for the required work.

Meanwhile much speculation was rife among these "merchants" as to who this really very refined and intellectual man—this Mr. Jonathan Adams (most probably of Boston, Massachusetts)—really could be, and what on earth he could want with such a book. And various were the conclusions at which they arrived.

One bookseller thought he was a story writer in search of a plot from real life; another felt sure that he was a lawyer compiling a book of famous criminal trials, and wanting more facts connected with this particular case

than he could get from the records of the court, or even from the newspaper files of the period.

But whatever their difference of opinion in regard to his object in wanting the book, every one honestly sought hard to find it for him.

But the search proved fruitless.

Then one dealer, more enterprising than his fellows, advertised for the book, and kept the advertisement standing; but when weeks passed without bringing any response he stopped it.

Then Valdimir Desparde put the same advertisement in all the city papers, with the determination to keep it there for months if necessary, until he should find the coveted pamphlet, that seemed to grow more precious, and more to be desired, with every difficulty and delay he met with in his search for it.

To find this work seemed now the one object of his life. He had become quite morbid on the subject. He might have seemed insane upon it, had not his clear, sound reason told him that he *was* morbid in attaching so much importance to the discovery of that pamphlet, and even caused him to wonder at the power of the sustained impulse that continued to drive him in the vain pursuit.

We said the finding of that book seemed to be the one object of his life; but it was not the only source of his anxiety.

He longed to hear from his home—from Arielle!

He had written to Brandon Coyle on the very same day on which he had embarked from New York for New Orleans. He had given his correspondent instructions to address his next letter to the general postoffice at New Orleans.

After the first two weeks in the city he had gone daily to the postoffice in hope of getting a letter, but had always been disappointed.

Then he calculated the time and found that four weeks at least, if not five, would be required to elapse between the day of his writing from New York to London and the day when he might reasonably expect an answer to his letter to reach New Orleans.

So he waited with impatience, but not with anxiety, for two weeks longer, going every day to the postoffice, how-

ever, to inquire for a letter, *in case* one might have come by a very swift passage. None came; and at the end of the two weeks he grew very anxious to know what could have been the cause of the delay.

When he had last heard of Arielle by the letter he had received from Coyle in New York she had recovered her health and spirits.

He was still engaged in his vain search when, one day, near the middle of August, he went to the general post-office, as it was his daily custom to do, and on inquiry he received a letter past-marked London, and directed in the handwriting of Brandon Coyle.

Too impatient to wait until he should get home to his hotel, he withdrew to a corner of the lobby, and there he opened and read the letter.

It was that letter from Brandon Coyle inclosing the second letter—the cruel forgery, the combined work of the evil brother and sister, but purporting to be a genuine letter from Lady Arielle Montjoie to her friend, Aspirita Coyle, announcing her ladyship's engagement to a gentleman "approved" by her grandparents, and it was "forwarded," wrote young Coyle, "from a sense of duty to a friend."

He had but hastily, breathlessly, glanced over Brandon's letter, and gathered that the inclosed one was from Arielle to Aspirita, when, without any forewarning suspicion of its contents, he eagerly opened and began to read it, thankful to his correspondent for giving him once more the joy of seeing the beloved handwriting; but when he came to the following words, his eyes dilated with amazement and his cheeks paled with despair:

"You say, dear friend, that you have heard the rumor of my betrothal to a certain party, and you express your surprise that I could so soon have forgotten one to whom I once seemed to be very strongly attached.

"Let me, in my turn, declare *my* astonishment that you should even *name* that person to me!

"I feel that it would be degrading to me to waste more thought on one who has proved himself so utterly false, base, treacherous; so I *have* consented to receive the atten-

tions of a gentleman, approved by my grandparents as entirely worthy of esteem and affection.

"We are indeed betrothed, and our marriage will come off in a few weeks. I bespeak you as my first bridesmaid."

Valdimir Desparde had not read quite so far as this in the false, forged letter, before sense and reason were submerged in the rushing tumult of heart and brain.

The scene seemed to whirl around him and disappear.

So he lost consciousness.

In the crowd that had gathered no one could identify the stranger.

His pockets were searched, but no cards or letters bearing his address could be found.

Only the envelope of the letter in his hand bore the address: "JONATHAN ADAMS, Esq., Postoffice, New Orleans."

So he was put in a spring wagon and taken to the city hospital.

Here he lay, attended by the hospital medical staff, for days in a state of insensibility, and for weeks too ill to give any account of himself.

When at the end of a month, he was able to answer questions, he gave his name as Jonathan Adams, and his address.

He also soon requested to be removed from the public ward to a private room, for which he declared himself able and willing to pay.

His request was complied with, and every comfort and luxury was supplied him.

Under these improved circumstances his vigorous young manhood successfully combatted both bodily and mental ills, and he convalesced slowly but surely.

On the very first day that he was permitted to sit up, and accorded the use of pen, ink and paper, he availed himself of the privilege to answer Brandon Coyle's false and cruel letter. That answer has been recorded in a previous chapter of this story, and need not be repeated here.

One week from the day on which he first sat up, and five weeks from the day of his entrance into the hospital, he left it, in full health as to body, though in hopeless sorrow as to soul.

He no longer cared even to pursue his search for the pamphlet once so earnestly desired.

Why should he care to unravel the mystery, or vindicate himself, now that Arielle was irretrievably lost to him?

Nothing now seemed left for him to live for; and yet he lived! If ever

"Conscience does make cowards of us all,"

as the great poet declares, it quite as often makes heroes.

If Valdimir Desparde, with happiness destroyed and hope dead, continued to live on with the prospect of living for half a century longer, he did so because he felt it to be his duty to the Divine Life-Giver to hold and guard His gift through sorrow as through joy, through ill report as through good report, until He should require it at his hands.

It was a great dread to the young man, this stretch of barren, dreary life into the long future.

But soon a way of escape opened. Before he went into the hospital he had heard that a few cases of yellow fever—that periodical scourge of the Gulf States—had appeared in the thickly crowded portions of the city, near the water. He had paid little attention to this rumor, his mind having been at that time engrossed by his anxiety to find the pamphlet and to hear from his home—even though people were then already leaving the city, as all who could get away always did on the very first note of alarm.

During the five weeks of his illness in the seclusion of his private chamber of the institution, he heard nothing of what was going on in the outside world. How should he hear, indeed—he, who had no friends in the city, and, consequently, no visitors at his bedside except his physician and his nurse.

But when he walked forth from the hospital he scarcely recognized the city again.

The once crowded thoroughfares were nearly deserted. Many houses were shut up and abandoned, many of the stores were closed, and an air of strange desolation and deep gloom pervaded the place.

As he passed street after straeet on his way to his for-

mer lodgings, he saw that only the druggists and the undertakers seemed to be doing an active business.

He reached the hotel, re-registered his name, and engaged better rooms than he had previously been able to secure, for there was a plenty of space, "and to spare," in that, as well as in every hotel in the city, for every one who could fly from the prevailing plague had fled.

Valdimir had been shielded from news of "the fever," during his confinement in the hospital; but now "the fever" met him at every turn—in the office, in the reading room, in the public parlor, in the dining room—everywhere, everywhere, nothing but talk of "the fever."

In the conversation going on all around him everywhere, Valdimir Desparde heard of the great destitution and suffering of the sick poor—of their want of medicine, food, clothing, and most especially their want of attention. Indeed it was said that there were many cases of whole families being sick in their houses, with everything else they could require except attendance.

Here, then, was Valdimir Desparde's opportunity. He had money—several thousand pounds, that he had brought from England—lodged in the City Bank. He had life and health and strength, all to give to the sick poor. He felt a thrill of *pleasure* in the thought that he had so much to give, but scarcely any merit in giving what he valued so little, what, in truth, he would willingly get rid of, if he could do so in the line of duty. He would not throw his health and strength and life away, but he would give them where they could serve humanity

The next morning Valdimir Desparde offered his services to the Christian Commission, requesting to be placed on duty among the poorest of the sick and suffering.

And he had his wish.

For many weeks after this he worked indefatigably among the destitute, fever-stricken families, supplying their wants from his own purse, and ministering at their bedsides to their humblest necessities.

One day, when he had just got through with his duties in a house where all the members of the family had been stricken, and where four had recovered and two had passed away, he went to the office of the Christian Commission to report.

"Glad you have come," said the commissioner then on duty. "Here is a house—a whole row of houses, in fact—but one house in particular of the row, where all the family, consisting of eight persons, are ill, with the exception of two young children. We have not a soul to send them."

"I will go immediately. Where is the place?" promptly inquired Valdimir.

"It is Leroy Place. The house in question is No. 7, a tobacconist's," replied the commissioner, referring to a memorandum on his desk, and then passing it to Desparde.

"No. 7 Leroy Place, a tobacconist's! Why, it is poor Yok's family! "exclaimed Valdimir, compassionately.

"You know the people?" inquired the commissioner, looking up from the book in which he was making entries.

"Yes! I knew them long ago in the old country. I have known them here also. I will go immediately," said Desparde, as he left the office.

He called a passing cab and threw himself into it, gave his order, hurried to his banker's, drew out a sum of money, thence to a drug store, laid in a store of such medicines as he knew would be required, and thence to a provision store for such articles of nourishment as would be needed, and finally on to Leroy Place.

There the sorrowful but too common sight of deadly illness and deep destitution met his view. No life was abroad in the place. No man, woman or child passed in the street, no children played before the doors, no faces appeared at the windows.

He drew up at No. 7, alighted, paid and discharged the cab, and entered the shop.

There was no one visible except Donald, the ten-year-old lad, who stood behind the counter, but looked so sallow and haggard that he seemed scarcely able to stand.

The shop was in the saddest state of confusion and neglect—the windows, the counter, the glass case and the boxes all covered thickly with dust, and the floor was littered with torn paper, shreds, straw, and other *debris*.

"My poor boy," said Desparde, pitifully, "you look scarcely able to be out of bed. Is there no one up but you?"

"Nay, but I maun mind shop," replied the lad, in a forlorn tone.

"There is not the least need for your doing so; no one is coming here to buy. Go into the back room now and lie down on that settee I see there, and I will come and attend to you soon. Now where are the others? I must see them."

"Upstairs i' their beds," replied the lad, who was willingly obeying Desparde's order, and walking feebly towards his place of temporary rest.

Desparde left the shop by the side door and went up the front stairs leading to the bed chambers.

Distressing moans met his ear as he reached the landing, upon which three doors opened, one from the front chamber, one from the back, and one from the little hall chamber.

The last mentioned was immediately before him. He entered that little room first.

"Ah! what a sight!

There, extended on the bed, lay the forms of Annek and little Eric, already past all human help, all earthly want.

"This is a case for the undertaker, not for the nurse," he said.

And he took from his pocket a roll of black cambric, tore off a strip, hoisted the window of the room and fastened the black flag to the sash as a signal for the "dead cart" to stop as it passed.

Then he went into the next room, where he found Alek Yok and his wife ill on one bed and two of the boys on the other, while in the back room beyond lay Jan Yok, dying, and the third boy delirious, and below, in the back parlor, lay the youngest lad, ill with the premonitory symptoms of the fever.

I promised to be brief with this part of my story, and I will be so.

That afternoon the remains of Annek and Eric were laid in the earth.

The next day those of Jan Yok were placed by their side.

All the other members of the family recovered.

But it was two weeks before Valdimir Desparde was released from duty in that house.

By the first of November there was not a single case in the city.

It was while nursing the last patient who came under his charge that fortune favored Valdimir Desparde in an unexpected manner.

The man was convalescent and seriously inclined. One morning he asked his kind attendant to bring him a volnume of John Wesley's sermons from a book shelf in the parlor.

Valdimir Desparde went to bring it.

The parlor was poor and plain. Three hanging shelves over the dusty mantel piece supported three rows of books and pamphlets.

Valdimir, looking for the required volume, took down several books, and accidentally knocked down a pile of old pamphlets.

In stooping to gather these up from the floor, his eyes fell upon the title of one of them.

It was the book he had been in search of for the last four months—"The Wonderful Life and Adventures of John Sims, Quadroon Slave, alias Valdimir Desparde, Gentleman."

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE DISCOVERY

'Tis not to pray Heav'n's mercy, or to sit
And droop, or to confess that thou hast sinned;
'Tis to bewail the sins thou didst commit,
And not commit these sins thou hast bewailed.
He that bewails and not forsakes them too,
Confesses rather what he means to do.

SHAKESPEARE.

VALDIMIR DESPARDE had found the pamphlet he had so long and so vainly sought; found it after he had given up the search in despair; found it when he was least expecting or thinking of it! It had suddenly fallen into his hands as if it had dropped from the sky!

Yet he handled it with a sense of shrinking, as from something morally unclean.

The next instant, however, his eyes were fixed spell-

bound to the picture on the cover—the portrait of a man whose criminal life and tragic death was narrated within.

It was a fine, dark face of wonderful beauty and spirit, which not even the rude wood engraving could spoil.

But it was not the beauty and passion of the face that fascinated the gaze of the beholder.

IT WAS ITS AMAZING LIKENESS TO HIS FRIEND, BRANDON COYLE!!

It was a stronger and more striking likeness than any photograph he had ever seen of the heir of Caveland! There were the same beautiful but rather sensual features, the same symmetrical low forhead, the same straight nose and full curved lips, which the short, well-trimmed mustache adorned, but did not conceal, the same curling black hair, thick black eyebrows, long and heavy black eyelashes overhanging large, luminous, languishing black eyes.

In a word, it was a perfectly pictured face of Brandon Coyle, as no photographer had ever succeeded in giving it!

Valdimir Desparde's amazement grew as he gazed! He dropped into a chair, still holding the portrait before his spell-bound eyes.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked himself again and again, without obtaining the faintest sign of an answer.

For even then not the slightest forewarning of the ugly fact he was soon to learn entered his unsuspicious mind.

In his amazement he had forgotten all about the book he had come to fetch until he was aroused by the shrill treble of his patient, whose voice was sharpened by sickness, demanding:

"Haven't you found Wesley's sermons yet! They are on the bottom shelf, hanging over the mantel piece! You can't miss them!"

Valdimir started up as one awakened from a dream, and snatching the volume in question from its place, hurried into the adjoining room, taking also the pamphlet with him.

"Here is the book, Mr. La Motte. And here is a pamphlet that I wish you would lend me," said the young gentleman, laying both volumes on the little stand beside the convalescent's chair.

La Motte pushed the "Sermons" aside for a moment and took up the pamphlet to see what it might be.

"I have been hunting for that work for the last four months through every book store and book stand in the city, and have advertised for it in every paper," continued Desparde.

"*This?*" said La Motte, in surprise. Do you mean *this?* This Life and Adventures of John Sims?"

"Yes, that very pamphlet!"

"And you might have had a dozen of them. My father-in-law was the publisher of it!" exclaimed the convalescent.

"Then why in the world didn't you answer my advertisement when I offered so high a price for a copy?"

"I never saw the advertisement—wasn't in the city. Just got back from my last voyage to the coast of Africa, when I was knocked down by Yellow Jack! If you want that book you are welcome to it! And a dozen more like it. My father-in-law died some years ago and his stock in trade was sold for the benefit of his heirs. A lot of rubbish was left on hand as unsalable, however, and a few dozens of *that* among it! Help yourself, my friend! Take an armful of 'John Simses' if you want them!"

"Thanks, very much, but this one book is quite sufficient," said Desparde.

"Well, I should think it might be of *him!*" replied La Motte.

"—And while you read 'Wesley," will you excuse me if I look over this?" demanded Desparde, in feverish anxiety to peruse the pamphlet.

"See here, my young friend," said La Motte, taking the book of sermons and putting it out of sight in the stand drawer, "I have lost my inclination to study the great evangelist now. Your interest in this fellow Sims has interested *me!* You can take that book away with you, if you please; but you needn't take the trouble to read it, because it isn't more than half true; or, if it is, the truth is so painted and varnished as to be hardly recognizable! Now, if you want the *whole plain truth* about the fellow, I can give it to you!"

"*You!*" exclaimed Desparde.

"Yes, *I!* Of course, I don't know why you should care to know it, or whether you mean to write a novel or a

drama founded on it; but I *do* know I can give you all the real facts, if you want to know them."

"They—the real facts—are just exactly what I want to know. And you say you can tell them?"

"Yes. I knew John Sims from the day of his birth to the day of his death. My father's farm joined his old master's plantation."

"Tell me all you know."

"Well, his father was a gentleman of high position, great family, vast wealth and very great pride, and a very domineering will! Yes, sir! His father was all that, and his mother was a pretty mulatto slave, with a temper like gun cotton! Those were his parents, Mr. Adams!"

"Is it possible!" muttered the young man to himself.

"Yes, sir! He was the son of a gentleman, of a very proud and arrogant race, and yet he was born a slave; for in our part of the country the children are born into the condition of the mother."

"I know it," muttered Valdimir.

"Think, sir, what such a boy, the offspring of such opposite and jarring elements of character, must have been! Think of the slave son of the slave mother inheriting the haughty spirit and domineering temper of the master father! Do you wonder he grew up 'neither fearing God nor regarding man,' and with a hatred of the whole human race burning in his heart? Do you wonder that, while yet a lad, he became a fugitive from slavery, and that he ended his career by slaying his young master? and let the terrible truth be known, *his brother*—for, sir, they were sons of one father. But do you wonder at this?"

"I do not," replied Valdimir, in a low voice.

"No, nor do I. I only wonder such fearful crimes are not oftener committed under the same circumstances. Yet no one would have predicated crime of the little lad we all used to like so well! Why, Johnnie was the pet of the neighborhood. He was a beautiful boy, with regular features and large, soft dark eyes, and a shower of long, silky, black ringlets covering his head and falling around his face. He was the pet of the plantation and of the farm alike. Everybody loved the boy, and he warmly responded to all love. He was his pretty, affectionate mother all over again! But the demon was in him, for all that, sir! His father's

demon was in him! And being in him, of course it had to come out of him."

"Of course," mechanically assented Desparde.

"Well, sir, when the boy was about thirteen years old, his poor, little, pretty mother died. He had no brother or sister, no acknowledged tie on earth but his mother. When she was gone, all ties between him and the plantation were broken. He availed himself of the first opportunity to escape from the slavery that was too galling to his father's arrogance within him. The opportunity soon came. The family went to Niagara that summer, as was their custom every year. And for the first time his old master took Johnnie as his own 'body-servant.' The young master was then at Yale College; but he joined his family at the Falls during the vacation."

"I am sure I do not know why I should ask you; but who were the members of that family at that time?" inquired Valdimir Desparde.

"Well, there was the old master, old Mr. Millerue, his wife, two sons and three daughters. The young man at Yale was the oldest; the others were growing girls and boys; and they were all at Niagara together on this summer of which I speak."

"Yes, thank you. Pray, go on!"

"Well, I can only tell you from hearsay what happened at the Falls. It seems that the beauty and brightness of the quadroon boy attracted attention even there, especially from a Canadian philanthropist, who first of all, wanted to buy Johnnie and take him to Canada to be educated; but, bless your life and soul, the Millerues received the offer as an insult, and young Millerue challenged the Canadian to fight a duel."

"And did they do so?"

"Lord love you, no, sir! The cowardly Canadian handed over the young Southerner to the police, and he had to pay an enormous fine or else go to prison, for sending a challenge. He preferred to pay the fine."

"And what next?"

"A few days after that the boy was missed and could not be found. Old Mr. Millerue offered a reward for his apprehension—not as a *slave,* you observe, sir—for that would have availed him nothing in that latitude; for as he had

voluntarily brought the slave upon free soil, as a *slave* he could have abandoned his amster if he had pleased to do so, and his master could have had no remedy; but Johnnie was a *minor,* and his master advertised him as a fugitive or an abducted *ward,* and offered a large sum of money for his apprehension. You see the point, Mr. Adams?"

"Yes, I see."

"Well, sir, nothing came of the reward offered; nothing more was heard of the boy. It was, of course, believed that the Canadian had spirited him away across the boundary line."

"An easy thing to do at that point," observed Desparde.

"Quite easy, sir," assented La Motte.

"But I wonder that the Canadian was not summoned by writ of *habeas corpus* to produce the boy in court," said Valdimir.

"Yes, sir; but, you see, 'before you cook your rabbit you must first catch it.' You can't serve a writ on a man until you find him. The Canadian had disappeared. No, sir; you may depend that everything was done that could be done by those obstinate, domineering, persevering Millerues to recover the fugitive, for, besides valuing him highly as a piece of property, they all liked him very much for himself. They came home that autumn in a fine rage, and never ceased to rail at the treacherous Canadian until the illness and death of the old man gave them something else to think about. The young master came home from college to attend his father's funeral, and never returned North. He remained on the plantation to oversee the overseer, and to protct and console his mother and sisters; but nothing more was heard of Johnnie Sims for years after his flight—not, indeed, until he was arrested under another name. Let me see that pamphlet for an instant, Mr. Adams. Ah, thank you, that was the name—Valdimir Desparde. It was a queer name, and I had nearly forgotten it. He was arrested under the name of Valdimir Desparde, and brought to trial for the murder of his master, then the younger Millerue."

The face of our young exile must have betrayed the deep and strong emotion that shook his soul like a tempest, had

he not turned in his seat so as to place his back to the light, before asking the next question.

"When and under what circumstances did he assume that alias?"

"Oh, you shall hear, sir! You will see what good use he made of that aristocratic foreign name. Why, sir, what with his beauty and his brightness, his college education, and his fine name, he, a fugitive slave from Louisiana, actually married a young English girl of good family. Ran away with her, I grant you, but married her all the same!"

"That was terrible!" muttered Desparde, with a shudder.

"It made a sensation down in these parts when it became known, I can tell you that, Mr. Adams. But——"

"Let me interrupt you for a moment. Did that most unhappy young lady know the antecedents of the man she so fatally entrusted with her happiness and honor?"

"No, sir; it appears that she believed him to be a Polish exile of rank. No, sir, she didn't know his beginning, but it is certain she did know his end. He had left her months before in Washington City, where she was reduced to such extreme poverty that the clergyman, or the physician, or somebody who attended her in her last illness, wrote over to the old country to her nearest relation to send her some relief, and he—the rich relation—came over in person to take her and her two children back with him. But, Lord love you, sir, she was too far gone in a decline to undertake the voyage; so the best he could do for *her* was to move her to better lodgings and make her comfortable as long as she lived. After her death that same rich relation took the boy and girl home with him to England."

Our exile bowed his smitten head under the force of this corroborating testimony to the truth of his own early recollections. Did he not remember the last illness of his mother, the visit of the clergyman, the letter written by her bedside, the arrival some time later of the wealthy rlative, their removal from squalor to splendor, then the death and funeral of their mother, and the departure and sea voyage of himself and his sister under the guardianship of their wealthy relative? Did he not remember the severe reticence of their guardian upon all subjects connected with the early life of himself and his sister?

As he remembered these circumstances and compared them with the present statement of La Motte, the faint hope that had arisen in his heart—the hope that, after all, the felon who had taken his name for an alias might really not be anything to him—sank under the overwhelming weight of the circumstantial evidence. But here a question occurred to him:

"Since all this happened to the ill-fated young lady in Washington City, and you were in New Orleans at the time, how did you become acquainted with the circumstances?"

La Motte stared at his questioner for a moment, and then answered:

"Why, through the Washington correspondents of the New Orleans papers to be sure; Why, sir, do you think such a sensational story as *that,* connected with a criminal trial, could be corked up in a bottle even?"

"I suppose not. But will you tell me something of this man's history between the time of his flight from his master at the age of thirteen and his execution at the age of thirty-three? Something else, I mean, beyond the one bald fact of his having run away with a young English lady whom he courted under a false name. I could, of course, read this pamphlet, and I shall do so after a while. But, in the meanwhile, I wish to have *your* account, which, you, say, will be the most truthful of the two."

"Yes, sir, for it will be given from my own knowledge, or from evidence heard by me in court."

"Then I shall thank you for the authentic narrative, I assure you."

"One thing I must specify of this young man from the beginning—that, notwithstanding his really brilliant genius and his college education, he had the streak of an idiot or a maniac in him, or he never *could* have acted the mad part he did in conducting himself with such a reckless disregard of consequences."

"Is not *all* crime insanity? Are not all criminals maniacs?" put in Desparde.

"Hum-m-me!" muttered La Motte, slowly. "All crime may be moral insanity, if you please, but not mental insanity. What I meant to say of the man in question is this—that he was not only morally perverted, but mentally unsound, as you will see before we have done with

his story. You want me to begin with this from the time of his flight from Niagara Falls?"

"I do."

"Well, Mr. Adams, as it turned out, the master's suspicion was the truth—the Canadian *had* assisted him to flee into Canada. The Canadian met him at some given point on the route and took him to Montreal."

"Yes."

"When they arrived at that city his benefactor interested certain reformers, philanthropists, and abolitionists in his favor, and they placed the boy in the Jesuit College to be educated. And there he remained for eight years—beginning his education in the lowest class of the preparatory school, and ascending gradually to the highest, winning, through his whole school and college career, 'golden opinions' from classmates, professors and patrons. Ambition seemed to be the ruling passion of the youth—pride inherited from his father's haughty race, sir. You see that?"

"Yes," sighed Desparde.

"Well, sir, at the end of eight years he graduated with the highest honors of his college. Ah! were not his philanthropic patrons proud of their work when they looked at this youth rescued from bondage and educated to become an honor to his race!"

"I presume they were," languidly assented Valdimir.

"But I am not so sure they did not alter their opinion about the possibility of making a 'silk purse out of a swine's ear' before all was over, sir. However, it was an experiment, and apparently a successful one. And so the experimentors petted the experiment. After he had graduated with such distinguished honor, his patrons put their heads together to provide for his future. They gave him the choice of three learned professions—law, medicine and theology. He chose the law as offering the finest field for his talents and his ambition. And, sir, he was placed in one of the best law schools in the country. There, also, he did amazing credit to his patrons, and finally graduated with the highest honors."

"It is strange that a young man of such brilliant talents and such excellent patronage should have fallen into such degradation and crime," commented Desparde.

"No, Mr. Adams, I do not think that it is strange. If

he had been taken younger—a great deal younger, before he could have had any knowledge of his birth and parentage—he might have done better. But he was thirteen years old at the time of the great change in his fortune, with the full memory of his degraded childhood, and with all his inherited pride. So the higher he rose in social position the deeper to him seemed the disgrace of his origin. The more honor he gained in his youth, the more shame he felt in the memory of his childhood. Thus pride and shame made perpetual discord in his soul. Surely you can understand this."

"Yes, I can understand *him,* with the evils of two opposite races in his organization."

"Well, after he had been admitted to the bar he opened an office on Main street; but clients did not crowd to his chambers with the enthusiasm expected by the young man or his admirers. He got very little to do. 'Satan finds some mischief,' etc. You know the proverb. The time that should have been devoted to knotty law points—to 'making the worse appear the better cause,' etc.—was wasted in amusement. Money that could not be made by law was won by gambling. He got into bad company; then into worse. Bah! what is the use of describing every milestone that measures the distance down the broad road that leads to destruction? You will find it all in that pamphlet in your hand. *That* part of the story seems to be faithfully enough related."

Valdimir looked at the book, but made no reply.

La Motte continued:

"One day all the world was startled by the shock of a tremendous bank robbery—by far the greatest haul that had even been known in the Canadas, and which utterly baffled the police from that day to the day when that confession you hold in your hand was published—when, of course, it was too late to bring the robbers to punishment."

"Do you mean to say that young Sims was concerned in the robbery?" inquired Valdimir.

"Yes, of course, though he never was suspected of it. That robbery was not committed by any ordinary burglars, but by young men who held responsible positions—and who, therefore, were never suspected. However, a few months after it had been committed, whether it was from

fear of discovery, or what not, Sims determined to leave Montreal. The excuse he made to his patrons, who were in blissful ignorance of his wild life, was that he had no success in Montreal, and wished to try his fortune in Quebec. They gave him letters to persons of distinction in that city. He went thither, but did not present any of his letters, for the reason that he did not intend to stay there. He had a very large sum of money in gold, and he determined to travel and see the world. He sailed for England, and he spent months in traveling both over frequented and unfrequented routes. It was at Gibraltar that he made the acquaintance of a young English gentleman, an officer in the 000th Regiment, then stationed in the garrison there. Well, it seems that this Captain Desparde——"

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## CHAPTER VII

### DAWNING DAY

Courage! You travel through a darksome cave,
  But still, as nearer to the light you draw,
Fresh gales will meet you from the upper air,
  And wholesome dews of heaven your forehead lave.
The darkness lighten more, till full of awe
  You stand in the open sunshine unaware.

R. C. TRENCH.

"EH? Stop! What—what name did you say?" exclaimed the hearer, in great agitation.

"I said Desparde—Captain Valdimir Desparde, of Her Majesty's 000th Regiment of Foot—the man whose money, jewels, letters and name he took, and for whom he passed himself off in this country."

"How strange!" exclaimed our exile, as the light burst upon him.

"What is the matter? You are agitated," exclaimed La Motte, in his turn.

"I—I—Captain Desparde was—a near relative," stammered Valdimir.

"Oh, indeed! Then it is enough to upset you!" said

Sims's biographer, who would then have asked many questions upon the subject had not his young hearer besought him to proceed at once with his narrative.

"To think of you being mixed up in any way with this! No wonder you wanted to get hold of the confession. Well, Mr. Adams, it appears that this Captain Desparde was himself descended on one side from English nobles, and on the other from Polish princes, and that his early youth had been passed in Poland; but his family had come to England after the suppression of the last attempt at revolution there, and that by the help of his English relatives he got a commission in the English army. His regiment was stationed at Gibraltar at the time he first met our adventurer."

"Yes, you told me that."

"Well, sir, it appears that this Captain Desparde was a very wild young fellow himself, and kept very wild company. But you might have judged as much from the fact of his acquaintance with John Sims."

"I should think so," assented Valdimir.

"At all events they were great cronies, although the Anglo-Pole, being the most skillful gambler of the two, won a good deal of the quadroon's money. Now came a crisis. The captain had applied for three months' leave of absence, which he confidently expected to get and which he intended to spend by running over to the United States and making a short tour there. He had never been to America, he had no friends or acquaintances over there, but still he wished to go. He provided himself with letters of introduction from persons of distinction in London to their peers in society in New York and Washington; also with funds for his voyage. He was only waiting for dispatches from the Horse Guards with his coveted furlough. But when the dispatches came at length they contained no leave of absence for the young captain, but, on the contrary, orders for the regiment to sail at once for Calcutta. Well, sir, all this the captain told his boon companion that night, and in his vexation got so drunk that Sims had to take him home to his quarters and remain with him through the night. That night it was that the robbery was successfully effected; but days passed before the loss was discovered; they were in the bustle incident upon embarkation. There

was not much opportunity for thorough investigation. The regiment sailed and the matter of the robbery was left in charge of the police. Not the slightest suspicion attached to John Sims. He, with his booty, took passage on a coasting vessel for Havre. And from Havre he sailed for New York. On reaching the great American metropolis he took rooms at a first-class hotel, registering himself as Captain Desparde. Then he sallied forth to present his stolen letters of introduction. One of the first letters he presented was from a gentleman in the north of England, by the name of—of—— Just let me have that pamphlet a moment, Mr. Adams, for I really cannot recall the name just at present; but it is in the book."

"Ah, thank you. Yes, here it is," said La Motte, turning over the pages and stopping at one. "A gentleman of the name of Coyle—Christopher Coyle, Esq., of Caveland, to his brother, Donald Coyle, banker, New York. That was it. Mr. Adams! Bless my soul, sir! you are ill! Jove! I hope you haven't got the fever!" cried La Motte, who, in returning the pamphlet to Valdimir, was shocked to perceive the extreme agitation of the young man.

"No, no, no! go on!" exclaimed the latter, urgently.

"Yes, but see here, you know! This is not a-going to do! You are shaking like an ague! It always comes on with an ague! Let me try to get out to the next door and have the people send for the doctor for you! I could do that much for the man who has nursed me through my illness," remonstrated La Motte.

"No, no, no! I assure you I am not ill, or in danger of being ill—in body, at least! It is the surprise—the shock! You must know that Mr. Coyle of Caveland is an old and intimate friend of my family," said Valdimir, feelng that some explanaton of his emotion must be made before La Motte could be induced to go on with his story.

"Oh, ah—indeed—yes. By Jove, though, it looks like a good many of your friends got mixed up in the life and adventures of Johnnie Sims," said La Motte.

"A good many *did,*" Valdimir acknowledged.

"Which, of course, accounts for your anxiety to get hold of his confession! All right."

"And now will you go on with the narrative, Mr. La Motte?"

"Of course I will. Well, Sims presented his letters of credit—both social and financial—and they were all equally honored. It must have been fun for the rogue, however, to have Mr. Donald Coyle go with him to the banker's on whom his bills of exchange were drawn, to identify him as Captain Valdimir Desparde—for, of course, sir, as I told you before, Sims first of all presented his letter of introduction from Mr. Coyle of Caveland to Mr. Donald Coyle of Wall street, who received his brother's young friend with the greatest cordiality, and offered every service in his power—the hospitality of his home, among other favors."

As La Motte spoke, day seemed to be dawning in the long, dark night of the young exile's despair, and to grow lighter and brighter with every moment and every word.

"Well, Mr. Adams, John Sims, 'Captain Desparde,' as he called himself, became a frequent visitor at Mr. Donold Coyle's house. That gentleman had 'one fair daughter and no more.' Why should we tell the story that is as old as that of Eve and the serpent? The dark, brilliant Creole fell in love with the fair English girl, or with her fortune, or with both. He wooed her very much as another dark gentleman wooed his love—by telling her hair-raising, blood-curdling, marrow-freezing stories, and making himself the hero of them all! He told her romances about his maternal grandfather, the Polish Prince Valdimir Zarinski, and himself in the fights for freedom—

'Where they all, side by side, had striven
And o'er the dead their coursers driven,'

until the girl's head was turned completely, and she reciprocated his passion, and gave him leave to 'speak to pa.' Mr. Coyle made no serious objection to the marriage, but some little difficulty about the settlements, requiring also to see some authenticated statements of Captain Desparde's estate, or prospects, or means of supporting a wife, outside of his pay in the army, which the old man declared to be insufficient—difficulties which the impatient young couple cut short by an elopement!"

"So this John Sims really married a Miss Coyle?" said Valdimir Desparde, "with the sigh of a great deliverance."

"Yes, he actually married a Miss Coyle! Poor unfortunate girl! After the runaway marriage the young couple went to the old man to ask forgiveness. They were too late! The shock of his daughter's elopement, coming upon top of other severe troubles, was too much for the father to bear. They brought on a fit of apoplexy of which he died."

"That must have been a terrible blow to the erring daughter," said Valdimir.

"Yes, I should think so. To run away and get married, and come immediately back to ask forgiveness, and to find her father dead! It was the first of a series of severe penances she had to pay for her mad and fatal act!"

"You spoke of other troubles that had affected Mr. Donald Coyle," said Valdimir.

"Ah, yes! But they were not known or suspected while he lived. After his death it was discovered that he was utterly insolvent! His creditors seized everything—house, furniture, clothing. His daughter was left penniless. When she had got over the first excesses of her grief and remorse, she explained to her husband that although her father's fortune was gone, yet she was the sole heiress of her uncle, Mr. Christopher Coyle, of Caveland, who would have taken care of her if she had not been married, and she even proposed to Sims to take her over to visit this uncle. But, of course, Sims would as soon have jumped into the fire. For to have gone to Caveland, where the *real* Captain Desparde was well known, would have been to expose himself as an imposter and subject himself to arrest and prosecution. He was even afraid to remain in New York lest some traveling Englishman who knew Captain Desparde should discover him to be a fraud. He left the city with his young wife, and for the next six years they traveled from city to city, throughout the civilized world, where he sometimes went by one name and sometimes by another, for he lived by gambling, swindling, and—stealing. At last, after six years of such adventure, he fetched up at Washington City, where he took rooms at a good hotel, and registered himself and party as 'Captain Desparde, wife, and two children.' Here he gambled, and won money, and lived in style, though not in the best company,

for he was known as a gambler, and suspected as an adventurer."

"It was there, I have heard, that his Nemesis met him," said Valdimir.

"Yes, sir; it was in Washington City that his Nemesis met him, in the form of our member from his master's district. I told you the fellow had a strain of idiocy or mania in him; if he had not had would he ever have ventured to go to Washington City, where it was at least *possible* that some Southerner who had known him as a boy might meet and recognize him as a fugitive slave?"

"Perhaps his many years' immunity from suspicion or arrest had made him reckless. Perhaps also he placed too much confidence in the change of his personal appearance," suggested.

"It may have been so, sir. But as to the change in his personal appearance—to be sure, he had grown taller and stouter—but a remarkable face like his retains its character always, and can never be forgotten, or fail to be recognized. This was really what happened to him in Washington. Our member met him at the faro table and recognized him at once—having known Johnnie from childhood up to his thirteenth year, and seen him almost daily in the interim—and what is more, he saw that Sims had also recognized him, and trembled. But mark you, sir, how well our member—Mr. Dubourg—acted his part. He gave no sign of recognition, but treated 'Captain Desparde' with all the respect he would have paid to any other gentleman whom he had socially met. But mark you again! That night a letter went off to Louisiana to warn Mr. Eugene Millerue that his fugitive slave, John Sims, was then in Washington, and a detective was employed by Dubourg in the interests of his friend, to keep sight of 'Captain Desparde!'"

"Who fled, of course."

"Oh, you may safely swear that! He was not deceived by the fair politeness of his master's old neighbor, whom he knew so well. He was not thrown off his guard by bows and smiles. He stood 'not on the order of' *his* going, but went 'at once.' He left wife and children behind him, and started for New York that night, probably intending to catch a steamer for Liverpool. However, fate, or his

luck, has turned, or something was amiss with his destinies. On the train he was taken suddenly ill—so ill, that when it reached the Baltimore station he had to be lifted from the cars and conveyed to a hospital, followed by the detective, in plain clothes, who had 'shadowed' him from Washington. He was virtually a prisoner from that moment. He was very ill with malarial fever for three weeks, watched over by the detective, who remained in the neighborhood, in the pay of Dubourg, and visited the patietn every day as a friend. His wife was not notified of his condition. The man himself did not desire it. He was flying for freedom, or intending to do so, as soon as he should be able to go, and he could not be encumbered with wife or children, so he did not ask that she should be told if his illness. Nor did Mr. Dubourg think it at all proper that anything should be said to her on the subject. He had seen her at the hotel. He told all about it when he got home. He had seen that she was well educated and ladylike, and was told that she was English by birth. He believed that she had been trepanned into this degrading marriage, and he judged, under the circumstances, that the sooner she lost all trace of this man the better it would be for herself and her unfortunate children. So he would not have her notified of that which was known only to himself and the detective."

"It was a difficult question to decide," said Valdimir.

"It would be to *you,* sir, but it was not to him. He considered the marriage unnatural and monstrous, and the lady a victim of a hideous wrong! Well, sir, at the end of four weeks, just when John Sims was preparing to renew his flight, officers sent by his master arrived at Baltimore, armed with authority to arrest John Sims, alias Valdimir Desparde, as a fugitive slave, and convey him back to Louisiana. Oh! but there was a desperate scene!"

"It must have been," assented Desparde.

"Why, Mr. Adams, he utterly denied that he was John Sims, or a slave, or a native of Louisiana; claimed that he was a gentleman, descended from Polish princes and English nobles, an officer in the Brtish army and then on his travels through the United States; said that he had never heard of John Sims or of Mr. Eugene Millerue in his life! He threatened the officers with prosecution for false ar-

rest; threatened the authorities with the interference of the British minister; threatened the country with a war with England for the audacity of attempting to enslave a British subject! Talked like an outraged prince!"

"All of which was to be expected," said Valdimir.

"But all of which was in vain," continued La Motte. "Mr. Millerue had sent men who were able to identify Sims to the satisfaction of the State authorities, and he was delivered over to the officers. Then a very cruel scene ensued. Feeble as the man was from his long illness, he made a desperate resistance and was only overpowered by main force, and then handcuffed like a criminal and taken away."

"Sims was a lawless adventurer, no doubt; but it was not upon *that* account he was taken, but on account of his being a fugitive slave, which makes all this seem very terrible to me—an Englishman," said Valdimir.

"No doubt it does, sir."

"Excuse me for interrupting you. Pray proceed."

"Well, Mr. Adams, they took Sims back to Louisiana and lodged him in jail in New Orleans, where—he being more dead than alive—they took off his handcuffs, and then sent for his master, Mr. Eugene Millerue. And now, sir, comes the most revolting part of the story."

"The murder," muttered Valdimir.

"Yes, sir, the murder. It happened in this way: Mr. Eugene Millerue came up from the plantation to take his slave, whom he found ill on a pallet in the prison cell at New Orleans. He stood over him, pitiless, cruel, sneering. He taunted him with his assumed position and his real one; asked him how a fine gentleman of his epicurean habits could reconcile himself to labor in the cotton fields under a slave-driver. Now, Mr. Adams, I should explain here that the turnkey who had opened the cell, and who stood within the door, was the eye and ear witness to this interview."

"Yes, go on."

"Well, sir, Sims was silent, sullen, and immovable. Then the master asked other taunting and exasperating questions of the fallen and humiliated wretch, whose only refuge was in continued silence. Eugene Millerue, I must say it, had the temper of a demon! He was determined to make Sims

speak, and finally he threatened the man with the *lash!* Then Sims suddenly raised himself from his pallet in a sitting position, and looked around as if in search of some weapon, but saw none. Millerue, who seemed to divine his thoughts, laughed scornfully as he repeated that the overseer's whip should soon reduce him to submission. Then it was that Sims spoke for the first time and said:

" 'Who dares to degrade me with a blow shall die for it!'

" 'Ah, indeed! Is that so?' Millerue retorted, and raising the riding whip he carried in his hand, he brought it down across the face of Sims with a sharp force that laid the flesh open.

"Then, with the strength and swiftness of frenzy, Sims sprang from his pallet, seized the heavy stone pitcher of water that stood by his side and struck it down upon his master's head with a mighty force that crushed in the skull and laid him lifeless on the floor! It was the spasmodic effort of a man goaded to madness! When the sudden deed was done, the murderer reeled back and fell upon his pallet in a swoon. All this was the work of an instant, done and over before the turnkey could spring into the cell and cock his pistol!"

*"Oh, horrible!"* muttered Valdimir Desparde, covering his eyes as if to shut out the vision.

"Well, sir, the alarm was given! The whole place was in arms! The still swooning quadroon was handcuffed and carried to a stronger cell in the 'murderers' row.' The body of Millerue was conveyed to the warden's office and the coroner was summoned. You know what followed! Sims was brought to trial, convicted and executed for the murder of his master."

"And—the unfortunate wife and children?" inquired Valdimir.

"I thought I had told you of their fate, sir. Soon after they were left destitute by the attempted flight of Sims, they were turned out of their hotel, and their luggage seized for arrears of board. By the sale of her few remaining jewels the unhappy wife sustained herself and children for a little while in cheap lodgings; but the news of her husband's real position and tragic fate reached her through the newspapers and gave her her death-blow. She fell into

extreme illness and utter destitution. Then it was that her attending physician, I think at her request, wrote over to Mr. Coyle of Caveland, who, within a month after, came in person to the rescue of his niece, made her comfortable while she lived, and after her death, took her boy and girl back with him to England."

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## CHAPTER VIII

### MORE DISCOVERIES

Though looks and words
By the strong mastery of his practiced will
Are overruled, the mounting blood betrays
An impulse in its secret spring, too deep
For his control. SOUTHEY.

JOY? That word does not express it. No guiltless martyr of circumstantial evidence, unjustly convicted and condemned to death, ever felt such deep rapture on being at once vindicated and released as did Valdimir Desparde on being delivered from the imputed dishonor, worse to him than any other fate.

Yet through this deep rapture, suddenly sped a shaft of pain. This was the thought of his lost love. The discovery had come too late to effect a reconciliation and reunion with her! He would go back to England, and vindicate himself to the satisfaction of every one, but—he could not recover his lost bride! He had forsaken her on her wedding morning, and without giving any explanation of his act! And she had naturally and properly resented his conduct by casting him forth from her thoughts and accepting the attentions of a worthier man, approved by her grandparents. Thus she was lost to him forever!

As he thought of this, how much he deplored his fatal reticence with his friends as to the cause of his flight!

But it was too late now for such regrets!

He had kept the secret from them for *their* sakes! He had even allowed his betrothed bride to think evil of him,

that she might the sooner forget him and recover her peace of mind.

This he had supposed to be the generous and noble course of conduct. And in this course had been encouraged by his only confidant, Brandon Coyle!

Brandon Coyle?

At the recollection of that name a new difficulty occurred to the mind of Desparde. Had Brandon Coyle—had that cherished and trusted friend of many years consciously deceived and betrayed him? Or—had Coyle, being in ignorance of his own and his sister's early history, been also misled by the strong circumstantial evidence that seemed to fix the shame on Desparde and which had even convinced the last-mentioned unhappy man of the fact?

He could not tell.

That Brandon and Aspirita Coyle were the children of that debasing marriage between the quadroon and the English girl was now reduced to a certainty; but how much Brandon knew or suspected of the fact was an uncertainty. If he, Brandon, knew the secret of his own origin, and—favored by the strong circumstantial evidence—had sought to shift the shame upon the shoulders of his stainless friend, to deprive the latter of home, country, friends, bride, honor, everything that man holds dear—then was Brandon Coyle a villain of the basest order, worthy of his degraded parentage.

But if he was *not?* If he had been kept in the same ignorance of his early life as Valdimir Desparde had been kept in concerning his own? If he had been really deceived by the strong circumstantial evidence into believing the apparent facts, as he had represented them to Desparde?

Then indeed was Coyle to be deeply compassionated.

And then and there the magnanimous man, the true gentleman, resolved upon one course—that in vindicating himself, he would guard, if possible, the secret of Brandon Coyle, at least until he should have proof that Coyle knew the truth, yet consciously and intentionally deceived him.

That same night when his patient was asleep, Desparde wrote the first letter to England under his real name since his flight. It was addressed to Lord Beaudevere and announced the young man's intended return by an early

steamer, to vindicate his own course and to re-establish himself in the esteem of his friends.

Two days after this he left his now recovered patient in the care of the landlady, drew his balance out of bank and left for New York, *en route* for London.

He was leaving the breakfast room of his hotel, on the morning after his arrival, and was approaching the hat stand in the hall to recover his hat, gloves, and so forth, before walking out, when he perceived at the news stand beside it, a gentleman whose form and air seemed familiar to him. The gentleman had his back turned, however, and was bending down turning over the leaves of a newspaper.

Valdimir Desparde stopped suddenly and gazed at the stranger, who presently lifted up his head and looked around.

There was an instantaneous mutual recognition, and the two men sprang eagerly towards each other with outstretched hands and delighted eyes, like friends meeting on a foreign shore, as they simultaneously exclaimed:

"Fleming!"

"Desparde!"

"*You* over here!"

"Deuced glad to see you, old fellow!"

"When did you leave the old country, Fleming?"

"Oh, dear, ages ago! or it seems ages to me! I left England about the middle of last August! This is the middle of November! Only three months since after all! Yet it seems to me three years! I have 'done' the great Western world in this time, don't you know? Seen the Rocky Mountains, the vast prairies, the Father of Waters, the great lakes, Niagara Falls, the St. Lawrence, the Thousand Islands, Tammany Hall, the State House in Philadelphia, the Capitol in Washington, and—there I think that completes the list; but, then, one has to go over so much ground to see so little in this new country."

"The middle of August! Then it is some time since you left home; but have you heard, in the interval?" inquired Desparde.

"Oh, yes, I hear every week. They are all well, I think —at least all except the two in whom I feel a particular interest."

"And who are they?" inquired Desparde. "But stop!"

he exclaimed. "We are in rather a public place for a conversation. Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes, just left the table."

"Are you disengaged?"

"Quite at your service, or at that of anybody else who has more business with me than I have with all the world."

"Then perhaps you will come with me to my room, where we can talk freely."

"Certainly! Lead the way!" said Fleming.

The two young men left the hall and ascended to the bachelor's den on the fourth floor, where the clerk of the house had thrust the future peer of "England's realm."

"Well, Desparde," began Adrian Fleming, as soon as they were seated, "how is it with yourself? You have been in this country nearly six months! How is it with you and with the wife and bairns?"

"Wife and bairns!" echoed Desparde, elevating his eyebrows.

"Yes, certainly! You are married, are you not?" demanded Adrian.

"Married? No; no more than *yourself!*" promptly replied Valdimir.

Adrian Fleming laughed harshly at the comparison Desparde had ignorantly made.

"If you are married no more than *myself*—well, no matter. But come now, old fellow, between friends, what have you done with the bonny Scotch lassie and bairnie who accompanied you in your flight?" inquired Fleming in a chaffing tone.

"Scotch lassie? Bairnie?" repeated Desparde, in perplexity. "Upon my honor, Fleming, I do not know to what you refer!"

"Oh! then," replied Adrian, in a more serious tone, "I refer, of course, to the rumor of your marriage to a young woman of humble parentage as the true cause of your leaving England so suddenly."

"WHAT!" exclaimed the young exile. "Was such a rumor as THAT current in England?"

"Most certainly it was circulated and accepted there as the truth. But I infer from your tone and manner that it was false?"

"As false as anything ever invented by the father of

lies! *Who* set this report in circulation, may I ask?" demanded Desparde.

"I—*think* it was your friend, Mr. Brandon Coyle," replied Fleming after some hesitation.

"Brandon Coyle!" exclaimed Valdimir Desparde. "Impossible! He was in my confidence. He knew the true reason of my flight. He knew it from the first. He knew it was *not* the reason that you say rumor has assigned."

"*Indeed!* Then I must have been mistaken in supposing it to have been Coyle," answered Fleming, slowly and thoughtfully.

"But," gravely inquired Desparde, "what could have suggested to you the idea that Brandon Coyle started this false report?"

"Now that is just what I am trying to remember. But it was three months ago, you see. Ah! now I have it! I had heard the rumor without having heard its origin, until I reached London on my way to Southampton to take the steamer. I stopped a few days in London, and while there called on the Coyles, who were then in town. I also invited Miss Coyle to ride with me in the Park. And in the course of that ride the subject of your absence came up, and Miss Coyle told me that her brother had received a letter from you, confessing your marriage to a lassie of low degree, and giving *that* as a reason for your sudden self-expatriation."

"Aspirita Coyle told you *that?*" fiercely demanded Valdimir.

"She did indeed. Moreover, she added that she had coaxed the letter from her brother's possession and inclosed it in one from herself to Lady Arielle Montjoie, who was then at Skol. She said that she had done this from a sense of duty."

Valdimir Desparde uttered a fierce, half-suppressed oath, and made a gesture of desperation.

"I must infer, then, that you never wrote such a letter?"

"Never! If such a letter as you describe was inclosed to Lady Arielle, it was a base forgery!"

"Who could have been the forger?" mused Fleming.

"*Ah, who?* bitterly inquired Desparde, as the conviction of his false friend's duplicity settled on his mind. "I tell you, Fleming, that I have been not only the victim of

overwhelming circumstantial evidence, but of villainous machinations by those who have attempted to turn that evidence to their own profit by my ruin."

"'Circumstantial evidence?' *What* circumstantial evidence, for Heaven's sake?" demanded Fleming, slowly, and with great perplexity.

"If you have time to listen I will tell you. My story will explain my sudden and seemingly inexcusable departure from England on the very eve of my marriage; but I warn you that it is not a short one. Have you time for it?"

"'Time for it!'" echoed Fleming. "Certainly I have. If I had not I would make time. Go on."

As briefly as was practicable, however, Valdimir Desparde told the story of the cruel deception that had been practiced upon him, with all the circumstantial evidence that had supported the imposition, and that had driven him a fugitive from his native land.

"By Jove, Desparde! What I wonder at the most, in all this wonderful story, is just *yourself!*" exclaimed Adrian Fleming, staring at his companion.

"But why at me?" inquired the latter, in perplexity.

"Ah, Desparde! You have been the victim of your own easy credulity, no less than of circumstantial evidence manipulated by designing villainy!"

"Yet there *is* something mysterious and therefore suspicious, in the guarded secrecy that surrounds the early life of my sister and myself," said Valdimir, sadly.

"Well; but old Beaudevere, who is the very soul of honor and chivalry—a very Don Quixote of England in the nineteenth century—told you himself that no reproach to any of you lurked in this secrecy—and therefore, of course, there cannot be."

"No, I trust and believe that there cannot be any reproach, since he declares that there is not."

"But for all that I should insist upon having that secret out of the old gentleman before effecting a reconciliation with Lady Arielle," added Fleming.

"'A reconciliation with Lady Arielle?'" mournfully echoed Valdimir. "Have I not told you that she is lost to me forever?"

"Stuff and nonsense! I don't believe it!" roughly replied Fleming.

"But—but she is on the very brink of marriage with a gentleman——"

"'Every way worthy of her ladyship and highly approved by her grandparents!' Is not that the formula?"

"Yes, or something like it," sighed Valdimir.

What is your authority for that story?" abruptly demanded Fleming.

Desparde started. Brandon Coyle was his authority for that story, and after a short hesitation he said so.

"Stuff and nonsense. Arielle will forgive you as soon as she hears your explanation, if she has not forgiven you already, which is the more likely! Why, man! when I left England three months ago she was reported to be in a decline——"

Here Valdimir started and changed color.

"Do not be alarmed! *You* are the fortunate physician destined to restore her to health! She was actually pining away and dying for love, like an old-fashioned maiden in an old-fashioned ballad! You can soon cure her of that malady," laughed young Fleming.

"Is that true? Oh, Heaven, can that be true!" muttered Valdimir, in low, earnest tones.

"*I* tell you that it is true, and I hope I am better authority than Mr. Brandon Coyle! Desparde, when do you sail for England?"

"To-morrow, by the *Colorado*. And you, Fleming?"

"To England? Ah, Heaven knows! I sail by the first Southern Pacific steamer for Rio Janeiro. I shall not probably see the 'cliffs of Albion' for many years to come," answered Adrian.

"But the fair Antoinette? How will she like this long absence?" inquired Desparde, who, at the time of his own flight from England, believed as many other did, that Adrian was the accepted suitor of Miss Deloraine, of Deloraine Park.

The face of young Fleming suddenly clouded over.

"Ah! do not mention her!" he said, with a deep sigh.

"How, is the engagement broken off?" Valdimir impulsively inquired, and then he immediately regretted his hasty question.

"The engagement never existed, except in the imagination of gossips. It is worse than that, Desparde! Antoinette Delòraine, the young and beautiful heiress of an estate worth fifty thousand pounds a year, with everything to make this delightful and attractive, is dying——"

"Dying! Gracious Heaven, Fleming, how you shock me! Dying!"

"Yes; slowly, but *surely!*"

"Of what malady, for mercy's sake?"

"Of that hereditary decline that carried off her mother and her father! How could she escape? It is a painful subject, Desparde! But you may remember that when you asked me if all our friends in England were in good health when I last heard from hime, I told you that all were well except two in whom I felt the greatest interest, meaning Lady Arielle Montjoie and Miss Deloraine. But you can be consoled in knowing that Lady Arielle's malady is not of the fatal type of her friend's illness."

After this the friends walked out together and spent the forenoon in visiting various public places of interest about the metropolis.

The next morning Valdimir embarked on board the steamship *Colorado*, bound for Liverpool.

Adrian Fleming went with his friend to see him off, and secured a promise from him that at an early day after his arrival in England he would go down to Fleming Chase and call upon Sir Adrian and Lady Fleming.

"For you know, dear old boy, that no amount of letters from their good-for-nothing son will give them half so much satisfaction, as a visit from a friend who has lately interviewed him," added the young man.

Valdimir Desparde gave the required promise, and the friends parted five minutes before the ship sailed.

## CHAPTER IX

### KIT'S HOME

Amid the city—
The great humanity that beats
Its life along the stony streets,
Like a strong, unsunnéd river,
In a self-made course is ever
  Rolling on, rolling on!
She sits and hears it as it rolls—
  That flow of souls,
Made up of many tones that rise
Each to each as contraries.

E. B. BROWNING.

WHILE Valdimir Desparde is approaching the shores of England as swiftly as steam can bring him, we must return and look up our "Missing Link."

In Church street, Chelsea, London, there is a clean and unpretentious house kept by a retired butler and cook, who had made money in service, then married, and invested their funds in "furnished lodgings to let."

On a dreary, drizzling day early in December, when the London fog and mist made twilight at noon, a neatly fitted up front parlor in this house was occupied by one person, a handsome blonde woman, tastefully attired in a blue silk dress with white lace fichu and cuffs, and with her wealth of splendid golden ringlets looped up at the back of her head with knots of blue ribbons and lace. Sapphires set in pearl and gold blazed on her bosom and on her arms; but the sapphires were not bluer nor brighter than her eyes, the pearls no fairer than her skin, nor the gold more shining than her hair. She wore a heavy gold wedding ring.

A regal princess she would seem until she should open her mouth, when she would instantly betray herself to be really a very illiterate and silly peasant woman.

She was seated in a large easy chair upholstered in pale buff satin, her well-shaped, black velvet slippered foot rested on a hassock, and her elbow on the sill of the front

window, from which she gazed out upon the lowering sky, drizzling mist, and the wet tops of umbrellas continually passing along the sidewalks.

She was idle, lonely, sullen and miserable. She was utterly weary and disgusted with being a lady. She had no culture, no accomplishments, and no companions. She could not occupy herself with music, drawing, fine needlework, reading, or even with gossip. She would gladly have gone down into the kitchen, tucked up her finery, borrowed an apron, and helped Mossop, the hard-working maid-of-all-work, to wash the dishes or pare the potatoes; but as such a proceeding might have lowered her in the eyes of her landlady, the prim Mrs. Perkins, she refrained, and sat in wretched solitude and idleness.

Now, how came our poor Missing Link to this miserable pass, exchanging her lovely cottage home in the beautiful lake and mountain country for this dreary lodging house

"In the crowded city's horrible street?"

To explain this we must go back a few weeks to the night of Kit's sfludden disappearance from "The Birds' Nest."

It may be remembered that Kit had been moody, sullen, and intractable from the time she had spelt out the meaning of that paragraph in the *Fashionable Intelligence,* which had announced the marriage engagement of the Lady Arielle Montjoie and Mr. Brandon Coyle.

She was not at all convinced by "Mistress Net's" earnest and indignant denial of the truth of the statement, and even the bare possibility of the event it pretended to announce.

The matter troubled her. She brooded over it. Then she secretly wrote that strange, ill-spelled letter to the Lady Arielle Montjoie, warning her ladyship against contracting marriage with Mr. Brandon Coyle, and declaring her own prior and exclusive claim as the wife of the gentleman in question. This letter she put in her pocket and took to church with her on the following Sunday morning, and, after the service, she secretly gave it to her youngest brother, with a half-crown to secure his fidelity, and with instructions to take it to Castle Montjoie and deliver it with his own hands to the Lady Arielle. But it was a

week before the boy could get a half holiday from his place in the stables of the Dolphin Inn to convey the letter to its destination, and even then he was not allowed access to the presence of Lady Arielle, but was necessitated to send the letter up by the hands of her ladyship's maid. However, the epistolary bombshell reached her in safety, and caused the explosion elsewhere recorded.

But before that fatal or unfortunate explosion the Missing Link was lost.

It will be recollected that on the evening of her disappearance the unfortunate girl had seemed unusually depressed; that she had begged to be allowed to put the babies to bed, for that night; she had stayed with them until they went to sleep, and had then come in the parlor and seated herself on a low foot stool in the chimney corner and had asked to be permitted to sit there until her mistress should retire; how Net had kindly endeavored to win from her the cause of her depression, but could get no satisfaction from Kit beyond the senseless repetition of the nursery refrain:

" 'Heavy, heavy hangs over my poor head!' "

Nor was this any evasion on the part of the poor girl. Kit had really nothing to tell that her mistress did not already know.

She could not herself give any reason for her despair. Kit was suffering under a presentiment of evil and could not define her position better than by a repetition of the old nursery refrain.

She had refused to make her bed in her mistress's room that night, as she had always refused before.

But when, at last, Net dismissed her maid and went to bed, Kit did not ascend to her own little room.

She fastened up the house and sat down over the kitchen fire, with her feet on the iron hearth, her elbows on her knees, and her head bowed upon the palms of her hands.

She was suffering under such fearful despondency that she dared not go to the solitude of her own room. Here, in the kitchen, she was at least within the call of Mistress Net and the children.

Kit sat there a long time. She heard the clock strike eleven—twelve—one; but still she dreaded to retire to bed.

It was only a few minutes after one when she was startled

by a low pecking at the window—no louder, indeed, than the sound that might have been made by the beak of some small bird; yet Kit started and stared with an impulse of flight, but was immediately arrested by the sound of a familiar voice.

"Don't be frightened! It is I. Open the door!" whispered the voice through a crevice of the window.

Kit recognized the tones of Brandon Coyle, and impulsively, without a thought, sh sprang up and obeyed.

"All abed and sound asleep, I suppose?" said the man, as he stepped into the kitchen and closed the door.

By this time the girl had recovered the possession of her senses, and so she answered:

"Yes, but yo hev no roight to kem here until to-morrow! Yo promised Mistress Net yo wadn't kem agen until yo kem to-morrow to tek me away as yor woife, so yo did!"

"Hush! don't speak so loud, girl! That woman may be lying awake and may hear you, and come out here, and I do not want to see her again."

"Yo hed no business to kem, then! It's *her* house, and yo promised her not to kem until yo kem tomorrow to tek me away as yor woife and mek a leddy o' me!"

"Well, but, Kit, suppose, my beauty, that I do better than my promise," and instead of waiting until to-morrow, I come to-night to take you away as my wife?" demanded Coyle, with a sly emile.

"Oh!" exclaimed the surprised and delighted idiot. Is thet it? Then Oi'll call Mistress Net."

"Didn't I tell you that I do not want to meet that woman? Just remember how she treated me the last time we met. Do you suppose it would be so pleasant for me to meet her? No, Kit. I come now to take you away and introduce you at once to my uncle and my sister as my wife, Mrs. Brandon Coyle. Come, now. You may tak your wedding ring from the ribbon around your neck and put it on your finger, where it rightly belongs, and you never need to hide it again. Come, now. Get your bonnet and shawl and come along. You needn't take any luggage. Your plain clothes would not do to wear at Caveland in the country, nor at Coyle House in town. Come, my girl. Hurry!"

"But—but—but——" stammered the perplexed and be-

wildered simpleton, "mayn't Oi tek leave o' Mistress Net and the babies?"

"What ? Wake them up this time of night? No. Besides, I tell you I won't meet that woman to be insulted by her again. You know she insulted me. You can write to her and explain. Come, come; get your things on."

"But—but—she will be mazed! She will be frighted! And it will be breking my wurrud to her! Oi promised not to see yo till to-morrow, Friday, when yo wud tek me away as yor woife," expostulated Kit.

"Nonsense! It is to-morrow *now*. It is Friday now—it is after one o'clock in the morning!" exclaimed Coyle.

"Oh, so it is!" acknowledged Kit.

So you see I keep my promise to come and take you home to my family to-day," said Coyle, triumphantly.

"So yo do," admitted Kit; "but is it no an unco airly hour to tek me home? They'll noo be oot o' their beds for half a day yet!"

"Why, do you think they are at Caveland?"

"Ay! where else wud they be?"

"They are at Coyle House, Westbourne Terrace, London—a splendid place, Kit. And we shall go up to town by the two o'clock express, and arrive about eight, in time to reach Coyle House and dress to meet the family at breakfast. But you must hurry, I say, or we shall miss the train."

"Oh! if Oi could—if you wud let me—just say ged-bye to Mistress Net and the childer!"

"I cannot! I will not! And look here, Kit Take your choice. Come along with me *now,* or *never.* If I go away alone this morning, I will never come back again to ask you a second time. Now or never!" exclaimed Coyle, sternly.

"Ou, then, if thet's the case it's noo!" replied the unlucky girl; who then hurried up to her room, put on her hat and shawl, and came down to join her worst enemy.

"Here, wrap this closely around your face and head," said Coyle, drawing from his pocket a thick gray veil.

"Oi never wore a kivering over moy face in all moy loife," objected Kit.

"I know it, but you will have to wear this," persisted

Coyle, clumsily tying the veil over the girl's hat so as to conceal her features.

Then they left the cottage together by the back door, that fastened itself after them with a spring.

"Ou, Gude forgie me, ef Oi had only bid ged-bye to Mistress Net and the bairns!" sighed Kit, when she found herself walking briskly down the lane by the side of Brandon Coyle.

"You can write from London and explain," replied the latter.

"And a fist Oi mek o' writing!" exclaimed the girl.

At the entrance of the lane they found a post-chaise and a pair of horses waiting.

Brandon Coyle put his companion in this and took a seat by her side.

"Back to Keighly!" he ordered, the driver, as the latter closed the door.

The man mounted to his seat and drove off.

"Keighly? Where's Keighly? Annot yo going to Miston Station to tek the train?" inuqired Kit

"No! the two o'clock London express does not stop at Miston. We must go on to Keighly," said Brandon Coyle.

But in fact his true motive in going on to the next station and taking this special train was to cover up his tracks in this course.

He himself, and even Kit, were too well known in Miston for them to venture to get on the train at that station, unless his intentions towards the unfortunate girl had been perfecly honest.

For this reason, early in that afternoon he had gone by train to Keighly and hired this post-chaise from the White Bear Tavern, and had come over to Miston Church Lane to take Kit away. He had no sort of doubt that his personal influence and power over the poor simpleton would induce her to go with him. He had only to catch her when she was alone. He had, therefore, timed himself so well that it was after midnight when he arrived at Church Lane.

He had left the post-chaise at the entrance of the lane and had walked down to the cottage.

He had expected to find that Kit, as well as all the rest of the family, had retired, and that he would have to awa-

ken her, as he had been once accustomed to do by throwing up pebbles at her window panes.

But he found to his surprise that there was a light in the kitchen.

Going around by the back way and peering through a crevice in the window shutter, he had seen Kit sitting moodily, as we have described her, over the kitchen fire. He had succeeded in attracting her attention without disturbing the rest of the little household, as we have seen.

His plan had been perfectly successful, and now he had the wretched girl in his power to carry her whither he should please.

Fifty minutes' rapid drive brought them to the Keighly Station, where Brandon Coyle had just time to pay and discharge the post-chaise and purchase tickets for himself and his companion when the train for London thundered into the station.

He secured a coupé for himself and his companion, placed her in it, and seated himself by her side just as the train started. It was the express, and had only stopped thirty seconds.

Kit was terribly flurried and frightened. She had never been on a train before in all her life, and the rapid speed of the flying express seemed to whirl away her breath and her senses. It was some time before she could get accustomed to the motion, or be made to believe that if she let go the straps on the side of the carriage she should not be shaken to death.

But there came a reaction, and the next effect of the speed upon the nerves of the Missing Link was to swing her into a profound sleep that lasted many hours, giving her companion an opportunity to smoke and doze until the train reached Peterborough, where it stopped for breakfast.

Brandon Coyle awoke his slumbering and stupefied companion and took her out to breakfast in the refreshment room of the station.

There he was half amused, half shocked at the enormous meal of pork steaks, eggs, muffins, marmalade, coffee and milk consumed by the handsome animal.

After breakfast they returned to their coupé, and the train started.

## CHAPTER X

### KIT'S DAYS

Our waking dreams are fatal! How she dreamed
Of things impossible upon this earth!
Of joys perpetual, in perpetual change;
Of stable pleasures on the shifting scene,
Eternal sunshine in the skies of life!
How richly were her noon-tide trances hung
With gorgeous tapestries of pictured joys—
Joy behind joy in endless perspective!
Till at Fate's call * * * *
Starting she woke to find herself undone!

YOUNG.

THE bustle of arrival at Paddington Station startled Kit from profound slumber.

Waking up, she indulged in the long, loud yawn of the hard-working, sound sleeper when suddenly aroused. Staring around upon the novel scene and coming slowly to her senses, she exclaimed:

"Whar upon the face of the yeth be Oi?"

"You are in London. Come, bestir yourself! Straighten your hat, arrange your shawl," answered Brandon Coyle, who was beginning to gather up his valise, rug, umbrella, and so forth.

But Kit only stretched her shapely arms out at full length and opened her handsome mouth with a yawn that threatened to swallow Paddington Station and a noise that brought the guard to the door to know if anything was amiss.

"No!" roughly answered Coyle. "Only this fool, who does not know how to behave herself!" he added in a tone so low that it did not even reach Kit's ears. "Call a cab for me, if you please," he concluded, putting a shilling in the guard's hand.

"OOUW-OOOH!" sounded Kit, with a powerful yawn.

"Be uqiet, can't you?" rudely exclaimed Coyle.

"No, Oi can't, then! I'm no half awake yet! Oi'm just as sleepy as a dog!" answered Kit, clapping her hand be-

fore her red lips and trying to suppress another yawn, which, however, broke forth with all the more force for the attempt.

"You are too intolerably vulgar even for a fish wench!" exclaimed Coyle, angrily.

"Wull, then, whoy dunnot yo mek a leddy o' me, then Oi wunnot be voolgar!" retorted Kit.

"I fear that would be past my power," answered the man, with a harsh laugh.

And now as Kit had arranged her disordered dress, he helped her to step down from the car to the platform, where they stood waiting for the cab, which soon came up.

"To Piccadilly! I will tell you where to stop!" were the directions given to the driven when Coyle had seated himself beside his companion in the cab.

And to Piccadilly they were driven.

Coyle, regardless of his companion, took out his cigar, lighted it and began to smoke.

Kit had no suspicion that she was affronted by the act. How could she? She had been brought up in tobacco smoke, and had been accustomed to see her father, uncles and grandfathers all smoking together in one small keeping-room, without having been smothered or sickened, and this from the day she was born until the day she entered the service of "Mistress Net." So she took no exception to her " 'usband's" smoking.

She amused herself by staring out of the windows at the fine shops and great buildings, and asking what this, that or the other thing was.

At first Coyle took pleasure in imposing on her ignorance by giving her absurd answers.

"Wot's yon?" inquired Kit, pointing to a great theater.

"Oh! that's St. Peter's Cathedral. You have heard of St. Peter's in Rome, haven't you?"

"Oi dunno. Oi've heerd of Rome, though. Be Rome in Lunnun?"

"Surely."

"Wot's thet?" continued Kit, pointing to a splendid bazaar, with white marble facade and many plate-glass windows.

"The Capitol at Washington. You've heard of that?"

"Oi hev heerd of Wash'ton. Be Wash'ton in Lunnun, too?"

"Of course it is."

"Oi'm thenking a' the wurld be in Lunnun toon, beant it?"

"Most of it is."

"And wot's yon?" inquired Kit, pointing to a reformatory.

"Come, be quiet, I want to finish my cigar," replied Coyle, in a tone that silenced Kit.

Brandon Coyle finished his cigar and threw it away.

Then he ordered the driver to draw up before an imposing looking edifice—Apsley House, the town residence of the late Duke of Wellington.

"Is that Coyle House, where moy fowk-in-law live?" inquired Kit, staring at the place with an awe-stricken appearance.

"Yes, that is Coyle House," replied Brandon, not hesitating to lie in order to deceive his simple-minded companion. "That's Coyle House; but I must get out first and rap to see if any of the servants are up. It is very early, you see, and there may be no one stirring yet. I may have to rap some time before I succeed in rousing any one."

"Well, noo, I wud rather get oot," said Kit.

"No, no; it is very damp. The fog has turned to a drizzle. You must stay here until I get the door open."

"Very well; but moind you doan't slip in the hoose and shet the door and leave me oot here. Oi'll watch yo!" said Kit, who was always distrustful in the wrong place.

With a grating laugh Coyle left the cab and went up to the portals of Apsley House and rang.

A tall footman—looking like a grenadier in regimentals, except in his powdered head—opened the door, and a porter rose from his chair in the hall.

"I called to inquire after the duke's health this morning," said Coyle, in a low and respectful tone.

"His grace is better this morning. His grace passed a quiet night. Sir Henry Cooper saw his grace at a late hour," answered the porter.

Brandon Coyle left his card and returned to the cab.

Poor Kit was already on the step, ready to get down.

"Resume your seat—SIT DOWN!" exclaimed Coyle, in a peremptory tone, seeing Kit hesitate.

"Beant the fam'ly oop yet? What slug-a-beds they must be," said Kit.

"The family are all out of town. Gone down to Brighton for my uncle's health," said Brandon, as he pushed Kit into her seat and placed himself beside her.

"Now, wot wull yo do?" inquired the crestfallen girl.

"Take lodgings until they return," answered Coyle.

"And mek me a leddy?"

"Oh, yes; to be sure; make you a lady."

"Where now, sir?" inquired the driver.

"To Church street, Chelsea," answered Brandon Coyle; and the cab was in motion again.

All that little farce of going up and ringing at the door of Apsley House had been got up for the deception of poor Kit. And the temporary indisposition of the great duke—for whose health innumerable callers inquired through all the hours of the day—had afforded the opportunity.

Kit never suspected the deception, but she did inquire as they drove on towards Chelsea:

"Why cannot yo and me go doon to Brighting to um there?"

"Because I choose to wait for them here," replied Coyle.

When they reached Church street, Chelsea, Brandon Coyle looked out and directed the driver to draw up before a neat red brick house of three stories that stood about the middle of the block.

He was met in the hall by the landlady.

"Well, Mrs. Perkins, are our apartments ready?"

"Quite so, sir," answered the latter.

Brandon Coyle went back to the cab, helped Kit out, and led her into the house.

When both had got rid of the railroad dust and cinders, they met at the breakfast table, with such appetites gained in their long night ride as made them forget every other care in life but that of satisfying hunger.

It was while they were still at the table, that Coyle rang and requested the presence of Mrs. Perkins.

The landlady came promptly.

"This is my wife, Mrs. Brandon Coyle, Mrs Perkins," said the man.

"I'm sure I'm very proud to know the lady, sir!" said Mrs. Perkins, with a courtesy.

After breakfast the landlady and her guest went out in a cab together—not to Regent street or Oxford street, by any means, but to much cheaper and less fashionable quarters, where, nevertheless, to Kit's inexperienced eyes, the splendor of the shops seemed to exceed the gorgeousness of all the places in all the fairy tales she had ever heard.

Brandon Coyle had given her thirty pounds at starting, and she brought back a carriage load of finery, but not one penny of the money.

In a paroxysm of almost breathless delight she made her toilet for an early dinner. She put on a pale blue silk dress, with white late fichu and under sleeves, and had her beautiful light hair dressed and tied back with bows of light blue ribbon.

As the girl walked into the drawing room her lover gazed at her in admiration and delight.

"How do yo loike me noo?" inquired Kit, with a radiant smile that lighted her blue eyes into splendor and enhanced her beauty immeasurably.

"I like you very much, Kit," answered the young man, laughing at her, though he admired her.

At dinner Kit ate fast and voraciously, telling her companion to fill her soup plate *full* and not put her off with two or three mouthfuls. She ate her soup audibly, with deep, grateful "ha's" between each spoonful, and committed other atrocious crimes against good manners, much to the disgust of her " 'usband," who did not, however, venture to find fault with her, as he wished at present to keep her in a good humor.

Immediately after dinner he told Kit that he was going out on business, but would be back in an hour.

So Brandon Coyle threw himself into a cab and drove down to the city, and went into the Burlington Arcade, where he selected a "splendid" set of imitation sapphires, in imitation pearls and French gilt—a set which, had they been real, would have cost as many thousand as, being only imitation, they cost pounds.

He returned early, according to his promise, and found Kit standing at the window staring at the passers-by. She had no other occupation, poor soul.

"Kit," he said, taking a seat, "I have bad news for you."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl. "Is the old squoire dead? And must Oi tek off all these pretty things and wear ugly black?"

"No, not so bad as that; but the old squire is very ill at Brighton and my sister has sent a telegram to say that I must come down to him immediately if I wish to see him alive."

"Wull, then, we will go noo; but, moind yo, Oi'm no going to put off my pretty blue kownde with the long tail, and go in black for him—Oi'm no! The old squoire is none o' my blood kin, only my fowk-in-law," said Kit.

"Well, and you needn't. But I must go away immediately, Kit. It is a long drive to London Bridge Station, where I wish to catch the six o'clock train."

"Wull, Oi'll be ready in a minute."

"But you needn't go, Kit. As you said, he's no blood relation of yours."

"Wull, he's my fowk-in-law; besides, Oi want to go."

"If you go Kit, you cannot wear that pretty 'gownde,' you know. And you would have to wear black."

"Oh!"

"Nor could you wear these splendid jewels. Look what I have brought you!" he said, taking the parcel that he had laid upon the mantel shelf, untying it, and opened a red morocco casket lined with white satin, and displaying splendors that dazzled the eyes and dazed the brain of poor Kit.

"Be they moine?" exclaimed Kit, in a tone of enraptured awe, as she gloated over the treasures.

"Yes, yours. Let me clasp the necklace and bracelet on you," answered Brandon Coyle, suiting the action to the word.

"Oh! but this Lunnun toon be a great pleece! a gret pleece!" muttered Kit, in a voice of profound conviction, as she surveyed herself in the long mirror, after the highly amused Coyle had decorated her with the full set of flashing sham jewels.

"Yes, the greatest place in the world to produce such gems as these!" said the laughing man.

"They must cost a mint o' munny."

"Three—thousand—guineas!" slowly and gravely lied Coyle, for they had just cost three guineas, and were very dear at that.

"Eh! Gude save us! Oi dinnot know there was so much munny in all the wurld!"

"And now you know you have got that much on your person, and now I hope you will believe that I love you and mean to make you a lady."

"Oi'm thenking yo hev med me a leddy," answered Kit, turning around and around between the window and the glass so that the light might set her "sapphires" in a blue blaze.

"And now you will let me go alone to my dying uncle. You would rather do so than take off all these beautiful things and put on your ugly old black gown to accompany me."

"Ou, ay, Oi would thet!" frankly acknowledged Kit.

"All right, then; I'll go. My cab is at the door," replied Coyle, eagerly seizing his hat.

"Hold on a minnut!" cried Kit.

"What now?" demanded Coyle, impatiently.

"Be these splendid things moine, for *sure?*"

"For sure."

"And yo wunnot iver tek them away from me?"

"Never."

"And ken Oi wear 'em all the toime?"

"Day and night, if you like."

"Then Oi'll wear 'em all the toime except when Oi'm in bed, and get the gude o' them."

"Just so. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm off. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye. When wull yo be beck?"

"To-morrow, or next day, as soon as all is over," answered Brandon Coyle, from the stairs.

For the first few days of her "'usband's" absence Kit seemed happy enough in wearing and enjoying her fine clothes.

She gloried in the possession of no less than four silk dresses—all thin, flimsy, and cheap, but of delicate and beautiful colors, well suited to her own lovely complexion.

And sometimes she put on all four of these, one after another, in a day.

In this way she amused herself for several days, and then grew weary of the monotony.

Late one night Kit was surprised by the return of her "'usband," who told her that his uncle was still very low at Brighton, his death being expected every hour, and that he, Brandon Coyle, had only run up to town to tell her this, and that he would have to go back by an early train the next morning.

"Whoy dunnot yo tek me doon to moy fowk-in-law, at Brighton? Oi'm tired of my loife, biding here and seeing nubbuddy and doing nothing!" demanded Kit.

"Because there's fatal illness in the house and you would be in the way. Besides, do you know what is the matter with my uncle?"

"Noa!"

"He's got the small-pox!"

"Save us and sain us!" cried the girl, turning pale with terror. "Keep your distance then! Oi'm no moind to hev moy beauty spoiled by *yo!*"

"Don't be afraid! I took a bath in the sea and put on a complete new suit of clothes before I came here," replied Brandon Coyle, laughing.

And so he trifled with the credulity and fears of the simple creature, who believed him or not, as her mood happened to be.

The next morning Coyle left her again.

In her misery she went and made a confidant of her landlady, telling the good woman frankly of her own humble origin and of her secret marriage, of her impatience to be introduced to her "fowk-in-law," and of her "'usband's" threat to shut her up in a mad house.

Three days after this, on a dark and drizzling morning in December, Kit sat, as we have described her, dressed out in her light blue silk, white lace fichu, and "sapphire" and "pearl" jewels, leaning on the window-sill and looking out upon the dreary street, and wishing herself back at Miston, when, without warning, the door opened and Brandon Coyle strode into the room.

He was just off a night journey from that terrible scene that ensued upon reading the Earl of Altofaire's will, im-

mediately after his lordship's funeral, which ended in the exhibition of poor Kit's ill-spelled letter to Lady Arielle Montjoie, and the consequent exposure of Brandon Coyle's evil deed, and the destruction of all his hopes.

Kit started with surprise at his sudden appearance, and arose to meet him; but shrank back again appalled by the pallid skin, set teeth, lowering brow and gleaming black eyes that seemed to pierce her through.

His face was the face of a fiend, and there was *murder* in his eyes as he glared at the ignorant, half idiotic beauty, who, with all her simplicity, had contrived to confound all his plans and destroy all his prospects.

"Gude Lord! Wot's the matter? Is the old squoire deed?" inquired Kit, who had never in all her life seen such a terrible look on any human face, and could not read it aright

"Yes—the—old squire is dead," replied the man, struggling hard to compose his tell-tale features to their ordinary expression; for, until he had met the girl's affrighted eyes, and heard her exclamation, he had been unconscious of how much his face betrayed him and terrified her.

He did not wish to alarm her; to have done that would have interfered with his immediate plans in regard to her. He must now quiet her terrors, by putting her thoughts on the false scent that she herself had suggested.

"Yes," he repeated, "the old man is dead, and he died a dreadful death. I cannot get over it," and with this he walked to the farthest window and looked out, to conceal his face from her until he could compose it.

"Ou, weel," said Kit, kindly, "dinna tek it so very haard. He *was* an old mon, and beloike his toime had come."

"Yes," said Coyle, without looking around. "And his going off just now certainly makes everything easy for us. I am his heir. I can walk right in and take possession of Caveland now, and take you with me."

"Oh, when?" exclaimed Kit, eagerly.

"Immediately. You must go and get ready to leave London with me by the four o'clock train this afternoon. We are to go down to Caveland, where the remains have been sent and where the funeral is to take place. I am going out on business, but will return for you in time."

"Oi wull go pack up at once!" exclaimed Kit, hurrying from the room.

He looked after her as she disappeared, again with murder in his eyes—

"While in his thoughts her hours were numbered."

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## CHAPTER XI

### A DEMON'S DEED

Forthcoming events cast their shadows before.
FOLK LORE.

I see a hand ye cannot see,
That beckons me away;
I hear a voice ye cannot hear,
That says I may not stay.
ANONYMOUS.

BRANDON COYLE, since his exposure and disgrace at Castle Montjoie, had but two objects in view.

To wreak a signal vengeance on the beautiful simpleton whom he had berayed by a false marriage, yet who with all her simplicity, had had fatal cunning enough to write that warning letter which had arrested his marriage with Lady Arielle Montjoie and ruined all his prospects of prosperity.

And then to leave England and seek his safety and his fortune in the New World.

To secure these objects he was compelled to act promptly.

Immediately on leaving Montjoie Castle he had hurried on to Caveland as fast as his horse could carry him.

On reaching his own room he had summoned his valet, ordered him to gather up and pack his valise, with a couple of changes of underclothing and all his jewels, together with a small traveling dressing case.

Then having put on his ulster and cap, he threw himself into his dog cart and ordered the groom to drive him to Miston Station.

There he secured the midnight London express and reached Paddington at seven o'clock next morning and Chelsea at eight.

After successively frightening, amazing and delighting the poor, excitable creature, he left the doomed woman to get ready for her fatal journey, and went out to prepare the way for his own deadly revenge and speedy escape.

He threw himself into a passing cab and told the cabman to drive into the city.

He stopped the driver at a coffee house, where he got out and called for a private room and writing materials.

Here he drew from his pocket a blank check cut from his uncle's check book at Caveland.

Having the art of imitating any handwriting perfectly at command, he spread the blank check out on the table before him, and filled it up for five thousand pounds sterling, and signed it with his uncle's name.

Then he re-entered his cab and directed the cabman to drive to Bunson Brothers, bankers, Northcote street.

On his arrival at the bank he went up to the paying-teller's window, where two or three men were standing, and where he had to wait his own turn to be served.

Yet when that turn came he hesitated and quailed, not from any twinges of conscience, but from absolute fear!

He felt the situation. He was about to commit a forgery which, if discovered, would send him to penal servitude for life! He had often presented his uncle's checks for large amounts to be cashed at that very window, by that very teller.

But the voice of the paying teller sealed his fate.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Brandon?"

"Cash this, if you please," said Coyle, deciding quickly, with the desperation born of despair.

He received the money, put it in a large pocket-book, and that into his breast pocket, and left the bank.

On reseating himself in his cab he ordered the cabman to drive to Osborne & Son, brokers. Here he exchanged the bulk of his English funds for American money. Having concluded this affair he left the office, sprang into his cab, and bade the driver to go to the agency of the Cunard Line of Ocean Steamships.

Reaching that office he got down, went in and secured

a berth in the first cabin of the *America,* which was to sail from Liverpool to New York the next morning.

He took the precaution to get out his tickets under an assumed name—one that, seen in the list of passengers, might appear as a typical American name—George Washington Brown.

Having concluded this business he next went to a hairdressers, where he had his own luxuriant blue-black locks trimmed as closely as fashion would permit.

Then he drove to a theatrical wig-maker and procured from him an auburn wig and auburn whiskers—a color which would suit his black eyes as naturally as did his own raven locks.

These he put carefully away in his pocket to be used as occasion should call for them.

His next visit was to an outfitting establishment, where he purchased a suit of sea clothing and another valise, which he filled with all the articles likely to be wanted on his voyage.

His last two acquisitions were deadly in their significance. He took the precaution of procuring them at shops far distant from each other.

From a druggist in the Borough he purchased a three-ounce bottle of chloroform, and from a hardware dealer in Oxford street he bought an Italian stiletto, or small dagger, three-edged, fine and sharp, and folding into a case handle for convenience in carrying. These articles he closely concealed in his bosom as soon as he found himself alone. Then he went to "Véry's," where he ordered the most luxurious luncheon the house could afford.

And having partaken of this with as much relish as if he had not committed a forgery, and was not meditating a murder and a flight for life, and having drank a bottle of champagne and several glasses of brandy and smoked two cigars, he settled his bill, re-entered his cab and drove back to Church street, Chelsea.

Kit, meanwhile, had not been idle one moment.

Full of excitement at the idea of returning to her native village as Mrs. Brandon Coyle of Caveland, a "rale leddy and nobbut else," poor Kit ran up to the room where she kept her boxes and rang for the servant to take down such as she required, and made preparations to leave.

Little did she care for the supposed death of the old squire, except as it appeared to favor her own interests

Kit generously gave away much of her showy ornaments to poor Jane Mossop, and had scarcely got through when the latter was called down stairs to help her mistress.

Kit was then left alone and being a little tired sat down to rest in her easy chair.

And now a strange mood came over the girl—a reaction from the wild delight she had experienced in the immediate anticipation of being "med a leddy," and going to rule as such at Caveland; a reaction into a deep depression, for which she could not account; a presentiment of coming calamity which she could neither comprehend nor banish—one of those dark, foreboding moods to which the poor beauty had been lately subject. Such a one as had overcome her on the last evening of her stay at Net's cottage.

She sat and brooded over the situation until her weak brains were utterly bewildered.

Suddenly through her mental confusion came an inspiration that instantly restored that confusion to order.

She got up and rang the bell.

The landlady herself came up to answer it.

"Oi want yo to get me pen, ink, and paper, and a postage stamp," said Kit.

The landlady left the room for the purpose, and presently sent up the required articles by Jane Mossop.

When the girl had placed them on the table and retired, Kit locked herself in the room and sat down to write a letter.

Witless Kit could be as cunning as a fox, upon occasion.

She wrote a long, explanatory letter to her late mistress, Mrs. Adrian Fleming. She gave that lady a narrative of her flight from the Birds' Nest, her journey to London, her residence at Mrs. Perkins' lodging house, Church street, Chelsea, and of her impending journey down to Miston to attend the funeral of the late Squire Coyle, and then to be "set up" as the lady of Caveland.

But she also expressed her doubts and fears of Brandon Coyle, because of the rumors she had heard of his engagement to Lady Arielle Montjoie, and the threats he had made of putting her—Kit—into a mad house.

She concluded by beseeching Mistress Net, in case she—Kit—should not be heard from at Caveland, to "take the law" on Mr. Brandon Coyle, and make him tell what he had done with her, and bring her "to the fore" to prove whether she was crazy enough to be locked up in a mad house.

Such was the substance of the letter.

She enveloped it, and directed in a clear, though large and clumsy hand that nearly covered the face of the envelope, to

"MISTRESS NET FLEMING, Miston, Kumberland."

She sealed this letter and ran downstairs with it to the kitchen, where the landlady and her maid-of-all-work were both busy cooking.

"No. Kem here; Oi want to speak to yo in proivate," said Kit, leading the way to the basement hall.

"Well, then, ma'am?" inquired the landlady, following her.

"Yo see this letter?" inquired Kit.

"Certainly, ma'am."

"Yo tek this letter and keep it boy yo, safe for one wik! If Oi get to Caveland *safe*, Oi wull wroite to yo, do yo hear?"

"Yes, ma'am, and I shall be very glad to hear from you."

"Noo listen agen. If yo *don't* get any letter from me, yo'll know thet summat hev happened to me——"

"Oh! dear, ma'am, I hope not."

"Oi hope not, too, but nobuddy can tell. So moind, noo, wot I say to yo—if yo dunnot get a letter from me in one wik's toime, yo may be sartin sure Oi never got to Caveland at all! And noo listen good. Yo must pit thet letter into the post, and it wull go to my dear Mistress Net Fleming, and she would hunt me up."

"But—my dear—lady!" said Mrs. Perkins, in a tone of expostulation against fancied dangers and vain precautions.

"Do yo moind wot Oi want yo to do?" inquired Kit.

"Yes, my dear ma'am; but it all seems so uncalled for! Of course, ma'am, I will take the letter and be very careful of it, and I will follow your directions in all respects."

"Thet's it! Yo remember and do thet, and yo'll get yor reward," said Kit, as she turned and ran upstairs with a somewhat lightened heart.

"And noo Oi'm all right!" she said to herself, as she dropped into a rocking chair by the window, and looked out idly at the passers-by, in the drizzling rain that still continued to fall.

Her self-congratulatory soliloquy was cut short by the loud striking of the clock and the simultaneous entrance of Brandon Coyle.

"Are you ready?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes! readdy and wulling!" jromptly answered Kit. "Is it toime to start?"

"We have no time to lose. Put on your bonnet and sack and also your waterproof cloak, while I go and settle with Mrs. Perkins. The cab is at the door."

Mrs. Perkins and Jane Mossop met her in the hall to bid her good-bye.

And then Brandon Coyle put her into the cab and ordered the man on the box to drive to the Paddington Station.

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## CHAPTER XII

### A FATAL JOURNEY

'An awful sign stands in her house of life,
An enemy—a fiend—lurks close behind
The radiance of her planet. She is warned!
COLERIDGE.

I see a trifler smiling
As in delighted visions on the brink
Of a dread chasm! HEMANS.

WHEN they reached the Paddington Station Brandon Coyle alighted, paid and discharged their cab, and led Kit into the waiting room to remain while he went to take the tickets.

A few minutes later he returned and gave her his arm to the middle compartment of a first-class carriage which was empty.

The short December afternoon was drawing rapidly to a close.

The rain had entirely ceased, and the clouds were breaking up, and as they reached the open country the sun was setting behind the western hills.

Not a word had been spoken between the passengers since they left the station.

Kit leaned from the window and gazed at the setting sun very much as she used to gaze at it from the nursery windows at the Miston rectory.

Soon the transient glory of the after-glow faded entirely away, and the gray twilight came on.

Still Kit looked from the window. Star after star came out.

"Seems loike they were loighting the candles one after another up there, doan't it?" she inquired.

Coyle grunted some sarcastic but inaudible reply.

At the next station the guard opened the door of their compartment and lighted the lamp.

When the train moved on again, Kit drew in her head. The light within the carriage prevented her from seeing anything in the darkness outside.

They were passing through a flat, dreary portion of the country, in the hour when no lights gleamed from the windows or doors of wayside dwellings, when all without was dark, still and gloomy; no sights to be seen but heavy, heavier and heaviest shadows, no sound to be heard but the low monotonous thunder of the swiftly-rushing train.

Within the compartment nothing but the railroad lamp, reflected by its silver sconce, and shining down upon the crimson paddings, gilded cornices, gay tassels and gleaming little mirrors of the fixtures, and upon the sullen form of Brandon Coyle, wrapped in his dark ulster and with his black cap pulled down half over his face. He was apparently sound asleep.

So poor Kit fell into thought, and his mood brought even to her some spirit of self-questionings and self-rebukes.

For the first time she reflected on the anxiety and distress she must have caused them all, even the old grandmother who had brought her up—anxiety and distress in which they must have lived all this time of her absence, during which she had never once written to relieve them with the news of her safety.

And with this thought the poor girl fell asleep, in peni-

tence for her own impulsive evil doings, fell asleep softly, sweetly, unsuspiciously—but nevermore to awaken in this lower world.

Another hour of darkness passed on.

The rush and thunder of a huge freight train coming from the opposite direction startled Brandon Coyle from his fitful slumbers.

He rubbed his eyes, waited until the deafening noise of the freight train passed away, and then drew out his watch and looked at it.

An exclamation of dismay burst from him.

*"Now——!"* he cried, with a terrible oath. "It wants a quarter to twelve! In another ten minutes we shall pass the junction! No time to be lost now! It must be done at once!"

He stooped forward and looked at Kit. She was leaning back in her corner, sleeping soundly, like a baby, with her beautiful golden hair in disorder and her face turned up to the light—a healthy, blooming, peaceful, lightly breathing face.

Any beholder might have loved and pitied it for its infantile beauty and simplicity and its utter helplessness in sleep.

But there was no pity in the cruel, murderous eyes that glared upon it then.

"I might do the job now, without having to use the chloroform, only she is so closely wrapped up I could not get at the right spot for a swift and sure blow without waking her and—getting up a noise perhaps. Let me see." He began to examine her clothing; but the thick fronts of her waterproof cloak, wrapped and twined around her folded arms, could not be disturbed without waking her.

*"The throat!"* he muttered to himself; but then her long scarf veil was doubled over her hat and wound around her neck with the long shining tresses of her luxuriant, dishevveled hair in a way that could not be disarranged without rousing her. Still, however, he gazed and gloated over that throat.

"It is but a flimsy thing," he said, and he put his hand upon the veil very lightly.

There are sleepers whom the loudest thunder could not awaken, but whom the lightest touch would arouse.

Kit was one of these. She stirred at the feather-like touch of her own scarf veil as it was moved by Brandon Coyle. She stirred, and he shrank away.

"It won't do!" he muttered to himself. "I must not risk waking and frightening her—a struggle would be fatal to my purpose, at least to my escape. No, I must put her in the deeper sleep of chloroform and then finish the work. And all this before the train reaches the junction."

He hastily consulted his watch again.

"Only eight minutes left! I must be quick!" he muttered.

He had turned very pale and was breathing hard.

He seized his brandy flask, took a long drink, and then replaced it.

Next from his breast pocket he took the bottle of chloroform and a piece of sponge which he proceeded to saturate with the deadly sedative. Then he held it to the nose of the poor, sleeping beauty—lightly at first, until she had breathed in enough to make it safe for him to press the sponge over her nose and mouth and over her whole face with a fold of her cloak.

When he was astisfied that she was quite insensible, he put away the anesthetic quickly and as quickly drew forth a fine, thin, sharp stilletto.

With his left hand he invaded the folds of her cloak, and then the opening of her sack and basque, until he felt the warm bosom and the beating heart—beating slowly and feebly under the effects of the chloroform: Here he held the fingers of his left hand, while with the coolness and caution and ruthless cruelty of a demon, he guided the point of his fine stilletto, in his right hand, to the vital spot, and drove it in up to the hilt

The slain girl shuddered through all her fine frame, and then grew still in death; yet it must have been only a mechanical spasm. She could have felt no pain, and known no change until she awoke in the upper world.

Brandon Coyle, with his face pale and rigid, his teeth set, his eyeballs starting from his head, his whole frame trembling, stood holding the hilt of the dagger in his hand and gazing upon his victim for a minute, and then he slowly drew the dagger out, and wiped it on an inner fold of her cloak, and he hid it again in his bosom.

He took another drink of brandy and drained his flask.

Then his next care was to pose the body so that it might appear to be sleeping.

He did this with great ingenuity and effect—sitting her up, reclining on her right side, with her head supported by the corner of the carriage; then he folded her waterproof cloak loosely but completely around her form, so as to conceal the crimson witness that was spurting like a little fountain from her wound. Then he covered her face with her veil, and put her traveling bag in her hand, bending the fast stiffening fingers around the handle, and placing it in such a rest that it could not drop.

Having done this, he sat down and contemplated the effect.

He smiled grimly, even while he shuddered.

The illusion was perfect in his eyes, and might, he thought, deceive any one who did not attempt to arouse the apparent sleeper. She seemed a young woman who had deliberately tucked herself up and covered her face for a comfortable "snooze," and had taken excellent care to grasp a fast hold on her traveling bag while she indulged in a nap.

He had seen hundreds of women asleep in such a position.

The warning whistle of the engine told him they were now approaching the junction, where the Liverpool down train would pass in a few minutes. And by that train he meant to get off and escape to the steamer that was to sail for New York.

He gave a last look at the *tout ensemble* he had arranged. He thought he could not improve it.

He gathered together all his "traps," and then lowered the light of the lamp, and waited for the stopping of the train, which was already slowing into the station.

He saw that the Liverpool express was coming in from the opposite direction.

As soon as the train stopped he opened the door of his compartment, sprang out, and shut it again.

"All right, sir! I will lock it and keep it for you," said the obliging guard, turning the key and then going off to other carriages for a large number of people were getting off and as many getting on the train.

Brandon Coyle hurried across the platform to the refreshment room, and through that to the ticket office, where he purchased a through ticket to Liverpool, and then he flew as if he felt the foul fiend behind him, and thrust his ticket into the hand of the guard, who naturally ascribed his agitation to haste and anxiety to catch the Liverpool express, and so hurried him into a carriage just a moment before the train started.

In the meantime the guard of the Northwestern Express on the other track waited near the door of the reserved compartment for the return of his generous passenger.

Presently out from the refreshment room came a gentleman in an ulster and a traveling cap—a gentleman whose general appearance was so exactly like Brandon Coyle's that in the imperfect light the anxious guard took him to be the man for whom he was looking.

"All right, sir! Here you are! Look sharp, please, sir! The train's off!" he exclaimed, unlocking and throwing open the door of the reserved compartment.

The stranger nodded and sprang into the compartment, wherein there was but one other passenger—a woman, apparently fast asleep.

The stranger politely seated himself on the opposite seat, at an angle farthest from her.

The guard closed the door and the train started with its living and its dead.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ENTRAPPED

See how the hopes of life resemble
  The uncertain glory of an April day,
That now doth seem all sun and brightness,
  And then a tempest takes it all away.
ANONYMOUS.

Thus doth the ever changing course of things
  Run a perpetual circle, ever turning,
And that same day which highest glory brings,
  Brings also to the point of back returning.
DANIELS.

THE steamship *Colorado,* by which Valdimir Desparde had sailed for England, reached Southampton in the gray dawn of a dreary, drizzling day early in December.

Having no luggage to detain him at the custom house, he hastened immediately from the ship to the telegraph office, from which he sent a dispatch to Lord Beaudevere at Cloudland, notifying the baron of his safe arrival at Southampton and his immediate departure for Miston, and requesting his cousin to send the dog cart to meet him at the station on the following morning.

From the telegraph office he hurried to the London and Southwestern Railway Station, where he procured a through ticket, in conjunction with the London and Northwestern and branch lines to Miston.

He had just time then to snatch a hasty breakfast in the refreshment room before taking his seat in a first-class carriage, just an instant previous to the starting of the train.

His companions in the compartment were old gentlemen, each absorbed in his *Times,* and a young curate buried in his book, whatever it might have been.

Never had homesick exile returned to his native land with more joy in the present and more confidence in the future than did Valdimir Desparde.

He rode all that day, and late into the night, without

any accident to break the monotony of his journey, except the brief stoppings of the train at the stations, where sometimes he left his compartment to stretch his limbs, or to get a cup of coffee or a sandwich.

It was midnight when he reached a certain junction where he was to change trains.

As he left his compartment to cross the open space that lay between the two tracks he met a man hurrying from the opposite direction, whose general appearance seemed so familiar to him that he turned to look after him; but the man had already disappeared in one of the carriages, and the train was moving.

He passed through the refreshment room to get an apple, and had scarcely emerged from the opposite door when he was hailed by a guard who stood at a first-class carriage, with:

"All right, sir! *Here* you are! Loop sharp, sir, please! She's off!"

Never dreaming that the guard mistook him for another person, and thinking only that the man meant to hurry his motions, Valdimir Desparde ran up to the open door, and was immediately shoved into the compartment, which was closed again simultaneously with the moving off of the train

He saw that there was but one other passenger in this compartment—a tall, large woman, closely wrapped in a black waterproof cloak and a black hat, with a black gauze scarf veil wrapped around her head and face. She was leaning back in the right-hand corner of the back seat, and clasping a traveling bag which rested on her knees.

Her unnatural stillness caused the young man to look at her with some attention; but she only seemed to be most comfortably and soundly asleep. Whether this woman were young or middle-aged, handsome or homely, Valdimir could not see, and did not care.

As a matter of courtesy he took a seat as far as possible from her—diagonally across on the opposite side.

The light of the lamp was burning at its lowest; another turn downward must have put it out.

It was just as the murderer had left it to conceal his crime for a few hours.

Valdimir, believing that the female passenger had turned it down to favor her own slumbers, and not caring to read, or to do anything but indulge in happy thoughts, left it so, and leaning back, closed his bodily eyes upon this contracted scene, only to open his mental ones upon the immediate future that arose in imagination before him —the happy meeting with his friends, the joyous reconciliation with his betrothed, the brilliant wedding, the blessed union.

Meanwhile the train thundered on.

An hour passed. The train stopped at some large station. People got off, and people got on.

The guard put his head in at this compartment.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" he inquired.

"No, thanks," answered Valdimir Desparde, in a low voice.

"Can I do anything for the lady?"

"No, I—think not. She seems to be sound asleep," replied Desparde, a little hesitatingly, as he was answering for another.

"All right, sir," and the man closed the door. "Yes, mum! This compartment *is* engaged!" he replied, the next moment, to a lady who came to the door.

Valdimir arose to say that there were four vacant seats; but he was too late—the guard had marshalled off the lady to another carriage.

The train started again.

Desparde looked across at his companion. How very profoundly the woman slept. Not all the noise of the thundering train nor the shrieking of steam whistle when it was about to stop, seemed to disturb her in the least. She had never moved a hair's breadth through all the racket and confusion.

Valdimir gazed at her now in wonder for a few moments and then his happier reveries claimed him, and he closed his eyes and gave himself up to them.

Another hour of peace within the compartment, while all was thunder and flight without, and then the train, with much whistle-shrieking, slowed" into a station.

Still the sleeping woman slept so profoundly as not to be disturbed by all the dreadful noise and confusion.

Valdimir Desparde looked at her again with increased

wonder. She had not changed her position by the fraction of an inch.

"Poor soul, how tired out and exhausted she must have been!" said Valdimir to himself.

"Change carriages for Miston!" shouted the guard from the other end of the platform.

Desparde started at the welcome sound. He had not suspected that they had reached this junction.

He caught up his valise and left the carriage, closing the door behind him.

The first gray light of dawn was rising above the eastern hills.

"I shall reach home by sunrise! A good omen,' said Desparde to himself as he crossed the familiar tracks to the other side of the way station at which the Miston train was waiting.

A guard opened a carriage door, touched his hat, and said:

"Happy to see you back, Mr. Desparde."

"Ha! Bartholomew! Is this you? I am very glad to see you! You are the first acquaintance—the very first—I have met since my arrival in England!" exclaimed Valdimir Desparde, with a slight start of pleasure.

The thunder of the departing train which Desparde had just left, and which had started again on its Northern flight, completely drowned the reply of Bartholomew.

"How are all our people at home?" inquired Valdimir, when the din had ceased, and as he took his seat in the carriage.

"All well, sir," replied the man, standing with one foot upon the step—"except, of course—— You may have heard what has happened at the castle, sir?" he inquired, suddenly breaking off his sentence to ask the question.

"No, indeed! I have heard nothing at all lately. What *has* happened?" anxiously demanded Valdimir.

"Well, sir, it was to be expected, of course! His lordship was very old, and his departure should not grieve anybody; but the Earl of Altofaire is gone, sir!"

"*Indeed!* I am very sorry! How and when did that happen?" demanded Valdimir.

"Apoplexy—a week ago, sir," briefly replied the man.

"I am *very* sorry to hear that! And the widowed countess, how does she bear it?"

"Not widowed at all, sir. Didn't live for it! The countess—went nearly five months ago. Lungs, sir!"

"And—and—the Lady Ari——"

"Excuse me now, sir! Hate to leave! But must attend to business. What class, ma'am?" exclaimed the guard, as he closed the door, jumped off the step and ran to give a lady passenger a seat.

Valdimir sank back into his place, very sorry; not very much surprised to hear of the departure of an aged pair who had attained more than fourscore years, but very anxious to learn the condition of his betrothed, Lady Arielle Montjoie.

There was no one in the compartment with him. That was not an unusual situation on the Miston Branch Railroad. Few first-class passengers were accustomed to travel on this road at this hour.

Valdimir would have liked to learn from that guard, if he could have done so by *reading his mind*, what the people of Miston thought and said about his own sudden flight and long absence; for upon this subject, now, since meeting this man, he was feeling sensitive.

Ten minutes more, and the train drew into Miston Station.

In a tumult of emotion Valdimir Desparde looked out.

There were not many people to meet the train at this early hour As before said, there were but few travelers come by it.

The fly from the Dolphin Inn was there, and Jack Ken was on the box.

Valdimir wondered whether his cousin, Lord Beaudevere, had received his telegram from Southampton, and if so, why he had not sent the dog cart for him; but seeing no sign of the latter, he left the carriage, determined to engage the Dolphin fly to take him on to Cloudland.

But as he stepped down from the door he found himself in the arms of Lord Beaudevere, who had just that instant come up.

"Welcome home, my dear, dear boy! Welcome home!" exclaimed the baron, shaking the hands of his young relative with much emotion. "Welcome home, my dear Val-

dimir! But oh! you—you rascal! you ought to be hanged! What have you got to say, I wonder, why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?" demanded the baron, equally ready to laugh or cry.

"Nothing whatever, my dear lord. I throw myself on the mercy of the court, to 'head or to hang,' or to pardon, as it sees fit," exclaimed Valdimir, responding cordially to the greeting of his cousin.

"Come, come, now! You must walk with me to the carriage. It is on the other side of the road. Couldn't bring it nearer on account of the horses. Cut up like demons at the sound of the train. Come; where are your traps?"

"I have nothing but my valise, Beaue."

"Here, boy! take this and carry it on to the Dolphin Inn. Look sharp, now! And tell *them* to look sharp about the breakfast. Come, clear out with you! You needn't wait for a passenger here. You see you won't get any. The train is off!" said the baron, as he took the valise and threw it over to Jack Ken on the box of the fly.

Jack touched his hat and started for the inn at the same moment that the train left the station on its way further north.

The two gentlemen walked across the road to the spot where the Beaudevere carriage stood, and where the horses had a relapse into hysterics at the noise made by the departing train.

As the noise died away, however, the animals became quiet.

"How is my sister? I have not had a chance to ask you before," said Valdimir, when they were seated side by side, and the carriage was rolling along the highway towards the inn.

"Vivienne is well and happy since we got your letter announcing your speedy return to vindicate yourself. She was wretched enough before that, I tell you!" exclaimed the baron.

"My dear sister! Ah! I have a long story to tell you, which will certainly rather awaken sympathy than condemnation."

"Oh, I dare say. I dare say. But cut it now! You look utterly used up, and must have breakfast before any-

thing is explained," said Lord Beaudevere, a little coldly, for though he had zealously defended his young cousin in the presence of the Earl of Altofaire and Lady Arielle Montjoie, yet he really in his soul resented that supposititious low marriage of Valdimir Desparde.

"And how is—I would like to inquire after one whom——" began the young man, hesitatingly; but the baron helped him on.

"Do you mean the Lady Arielle Montjoie? Well, she is very delicate—has been so ever since you—— But we will let that pass," said Lord Beaudevere, breaking off in his turn.

"I see, Baron, that you still condemn me! But when you shall have heard my story, I dare to believe that you will not only pardon but approve my course," said Valdimir, quietly.

"Very likely! Very likely! I do not really wish to blame you, my boy! You mortified us all very much, to be sure, but then you certainly broke no law of God or man! I know all about it, Valdimir, my lad!"

"*You* know all about it, Beaue?" inquired the young man, in incredulous surprise.

"Oh, to be sure! Do you suppose, after your mysterious flight, that we did not set private detectives on your track and discover your whereabouts?"

Valdimir stared at his cousin in silence.

"We heard that you had embarked for New York under the name—the intensely Yankee name of Jefferson Adams, or Washington Monroe, or something of the sort—I have forgotten exactly what."

"Was it Jonathan Adams?" inquired Valdimir, with a curious smile.

"Ah, that was it! Jonathan Adams!"

"What cannot detectives discover!"

"And, my boy, your sister and myself crossed the ocean after our stray sheep to find you and bring you home."

"My dear Beaue!"

"Yes, we did! We went over to New York to find you and bind up your wounds, whatever they might be, and bring you home to the fatted calf and the rest of the penitent prodigal's reward; but we came home again with a wasp in each ear!"

"What was that?" inquired Valdimir, with curiosity.

"The news that you had left New York for New Orleans, accompanied by your wife and child. And as that wife and child did not enter into our plans, or even into our knowledge, we 'bout ship and came back to old England."

Valdimir stared at the speaker in mute amazement, and when, at length, he could speak, he merely muttered the words:

" 'Wife and child?' "

"Oh, yes, that girl from Skol you used to be so kind to! You see we know all about it! It is the old story! Old as Adam and the forbidden fruit! You were young, she was pretty, and—and—well, she *was* your wife! I'll do you the justice to believe that!"

"But the girl was not my wife!" exclaimed Desparde, still in amazement at the charge.

"Not your wife! Then you ought to be hanged, sir! I say now in earnest what I said before in jest; you ought to be hanged if the companion of your flight and the mother of your child was not your wife!" indignantly exclaimed the baron.

"Who told you that this woman and babe were my wife and child?" inquired Valdimir, without losing his temper in the least degree.

"The detectives we put upon your track."

"My dear Beaue!" said Valdimir, "you never were more misled and deceived in your whole life. I do assure you, upon my word and honor, that that young woman and child were no more to me than they are to you, or to old Father Peter Lucas at the castle. Now, Beaue, whatever folly you may have suspected me of, you never could have suspected me of untruthfulness; and when I tell you this, you know I speak the truth."

"And—and—Annek Yok of Skol was nothing to you?" inquired the baron, half relieved and half perplexed.

"No more than she was to you or to—the pope," laughed the young man. "What I admire is the acumen of these astute private detectives, and the easy credulity of their patrons and victims."

"My dear boy, I have wronged you, and I beg your pardon. But perhaps you will tell me what circumstances could have misled the detectives into making such a false

report of you, and—what—on—earth—took you off on such a tangent if the embarrassment of a misalliance did not?" inquired the puzzled baron.

"I will tell you the false appearances that probably misled the detectives, or more likely those that informed the detectives, for this is a short story; but I must wait a more convenient season to explain the cause of my flight from the country—which cause, as I said before, will more than justify me in your eyes."

Valdimir then gave a brief narrative of his unexpected meeting with Annek Yok on the wharf on the morning of their landing in New York, to which port she had emigrated with her child to join her husband; of her embarrassment at not being met by him; of his own—Valdimir Desparde's—in finding Eric Lan's boarding house, where he learned that the man had died of typhoid fever only a few days previous; of the keen distress of the young widow, and her resolve to go with her child to her brothers in New Orleans, whither Valdimir himself was bound, and whither he took the two forlorn ones, protecting them until he left them in the care of their relatives.

He ended his narrative by telling of the death of the mother and child from yellow fever.

"My brave boy! And so your good deeds have actually been distorted and misrepresented to your hurt," warmly exclaimed the baron.

"Did this story reach the ears of Lady Arielle?" inquired Valdimir.

"Ay, you may depend it did! And, by the way, it reached *her* through a different channel! Oh!——"

"Not by the detectives' report?" inquired Desparde, with an access of curiosity and interest.

"No; but through a letter purporting to come from yourself. Oh, I suspect there has been some grand villainy at work!"

"A letter—from *me?*" inquired Valdimir, in perplexity.

"Yes—a letter purporting to come from you to Mr. Brandon Coyle, confessing your low marriage as the cause of your flight! This letter was sent by Miss Coyle to Lady Arielle Montjoie."

"It was a base forgery!" indignantly exclaimed Valdimir.

"I assuredly now believe it to have been such. It only seemed plausible at first because it appeared to be genuine; it corroborated the detectives' story, and it was forwarded through the Coyles, whom we had no reason then to suspect."

"Brandon Coyle is a villain!" burst forth Desparde.

"An unmasked villain now, my boy! He has left the neighborhood, I believe. Certain discoveries of his misdeeds have driven him away. But here we are at the Dolphin, and we must defer all serious conversation until after breakfast," said the baron, as they drew up before the ancient hostelry.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### ARRESTED

Cold news for him;
Thus are his blossoms blasted in the bud,
And caterpillars eat his leaves away.

SHAKESPEARE.

THEY alighted and were immediately greeted by the whole force of the house and stables, from the landlord down to the bootblack, all coming to welcome the return of the wanderer and to proffer their services to him.

"Don't run over us, good people!" exclaimed the baron, taking out his portmonnaie. "There! there's a sovereign to drink Mr. Desparde's health! Now let us pass!" exclaimed the baron, as he threw the coin down to boots for the benefit of the crowd who immediately cheered and dispersed, leaving only the landlord and the head waiter.

"Why should we not just as well drive on to Cloudland?" inquired Valdimir Desparde, who was pleased but embarrased by this public ovation.

"Because I left Cloudland fasting before day this morning, to come here and meet you. And having ridden ten miles fasting, through the morning air, I have no mind to ride ten miles fasting back. This is on my own account. You, riding night and day, have come a railroad journey of several hundred miles, and you look—begging your

pardon for my candor—as if you had been exhumed, in a good state of preservation, from a vault! Come in!" replied the baron, leading the way into the house, followed by the landlord and the head waiter.

He paid no attention to them, but hailing a neat chambermaid who was passing, he called out:

"Here! Ann! Jane! Mary! whatever your name is, my dear! Show Mr. Desparde to the bedroom I engaged for him, where he can get rid of some of the railroad dust! And here! Send up his valise! Young Ken has it in charge."

The chambermaid of the country inn, having none of the pertness of her city sisters, courtesied and blushed and courtesied, until the baron ceased to speak, and turned away from her; after which she modestly and respectfully showed the traveler to his apartment.

Twenty minutes after Lord Beaudevere and Mr. Valdimir Desparde were seated at a breakfast that might have satisfied in quantity the enormous appetite of the hungriest Arctic explorer, or in quality the delicate palate of the most fastidious epicure; as why should it not, when the sea, with its treasures of fish, and the forest with its wealth of game, was at hand to supply the demand.

The meal was served in a private parlor, whence the baron had banished all the servants, saying that he would ring if they should require any attendance; for "Beaue" wished to continue his confidential talk with his returned wanderer.

Beaue ate slowly and appreciatively, asking and answering questions between times.

"Now will you tell me, Valdimir, what really *did* take you flying off to the uttermost ends of the earth, and that upon your very wedding morning, when you were to be married to the girl you loved, the girl approved by all your friends as you were approved by all of hers? You say the cause of your flight was justifiable, and even your motive commendable; you cannot feel any hesitation in explaining it."

"My dear Beaue, it is a long and complicated narrative, and involves, among other matters, the necessity of some explanation on your part of the mystery—I have the word; it sounds so affected or melodramatic; but I am obliged

to use it—the mystery that involves my own and my sister's birth and parentage and early life! Are you ready now to give me that explanation, Beaue?"

"Bosh!" exclaimed the baron, in an irritable manner, "there is no mystery surrounding your birth and parentage and early life! How should there be? Could the heir-presumptive of the Barony of Beaudevere be of—doubtful parentage?"

"Certainly not! Yet, dear Beaue, there *has* been a mystery made of mine and my sister's which hitherto I have vainly implored you to clear up, and which you will clear up for us, I feel sure," said Valdimir, fixing his earnest dark eyes wistfully upon the face of his cousin.

"Boy, you will ruin my digestion! That is what you will do, and it is a serious misfortune to have dyspepsia at my time of life! And what in the deuce has the mystery—confound the mystery!—involving yours or anybody's early life to do with your mad flight across the ocean on your wedding day, for which you ought to be shut up in lunatic asylum for the rest of your life?" hotly demanded the baron. "There is no more secret history in your childhood than there is in the—in the—foalhood of that colt we see kicking up his heels in the paddock," said the baron, looking around for an illustration, and then pointing through the window.

But Desparde noticed that Lord Beaudevere was agitated, and he knew that there was something behind that the baron kept hidden.

"Very well, Beaue, we will drop the subject for the present. Some time to-day, after we have got back to Cloudland and seen Vivienne, you and I will shut ourselves up in your study and we will have it out with each other. I will give you the whole story of the cause of my sudden flight, and you shall tell me the story of my infancy, which is well known to all the world—except the person most concerned," laughed Valdimir.

"Let us talk of something else," exclaimed the baron. "Let us talk of something else while they are putting the horses to the coach. You have heard of the old earl's death, I presume?"

"Yes; accidentally, from Bartholomew, the guard. It was sudden, I understand."

"Rather. He was seized with apoplexy on the occasion of a small dinner party. I was present at the time. He had been feeling unwell, however, and had taken no wine at all at dinner. So this attack was not pricipitated in that way."

"How did Lady Arielle bear the shock?"

"With great fortitude, although she was known to have been devotedly attached to the old man. Net Fleming is staying with her. *There* is a fine young woman, Valdimir."

"Net *who?*"

Net Fleming. Oh! I forgot. You have much news to hear yet. Net Starr, the rector's stepdaughter, is now Mrs. Adrian Fleming."

"Ah! *Indeed!* I met Fleming in New York. He never told me he was married," said Valdimir, in some surprise.

"Met him in New York, did you? I knew he was abroad, but imagined he was on the Continent, somewhere; didn't know he had crossed the ocean! Never told you of his marriage to little Net Starr? That was strange! Eccentric fellow! I sometimes think he is a little cracked," observed the baron.

"If so, it is with vanity! Married Net, did he! Not half good enough for Little Mammam! When were they married?"

"Last August, just before the death of the rector! There! that is another piece of bad news I had to tell you. The good Dr. Starr is gone. Died very suddenly; heart disease!"

"I am very sorry to hearG it!" exclaimed Valdimir.

"Well! what in the deuce do you want, sir? Did I not tell you I would ring if we required any attendance?" demanded the baron of the head waiter, who had now entered the room without knocking.

"Beg pardon, my lord, but here are two parties asking to see Mr. Desparde, my lord," replied the man, in an apologetic tone.

"Two parties? How in the deuce should any 'parties' know of Mr. Desparde's return or presence here? Who are they?" hotly demanded the baron.

"My lord, they are officers of the law."

"Officers of the law? What officers of the law?"

"A constable and a bailiff, my lord."

"I imagine it is all a mistake; but you had better tell the men to come in," said the baron.

"They are here," replied the waiter; and in truth the officers had been there, behind the waiter, all the time, never having lost sight of the man who was "wanted," from the moment the door had been opened at their command.

They walked into the room and took off their hats to the baron.

The first was a tall, robust, red-bearded man of about forty years of age—one of the constables of the county—the other was a stout, black-bearded young fellow of about twenty-five, the conductor of the London and Northwestern train of the preceding night, who was immediately recognized by Desparde.

"It *is* something in connection with my railroad journey, after all! But if there has been accident, or assault, or robbery, I am not able to give the slightest evidence in the case, for I certainly know nothing about it, whatever it may be!" said Valdimir, in a laughing "aside" to his cousin.

"Well, my men, you wished to see Mr. Desparde. There is the gentleman you seek, and I hope your business with him can be briefly concluded, for he has just returned from abroad, and my carriage is waiting to take him home," said the baron, as he indicated his cousin.

The constable bowed in respectful silence, and then turning to the conductor, inquired, slightly pointing to Desparde:

"Is this the party?"

"Yes, that is the man," replied the latter.

"My name is Desparde. What can I do for you?" demanded the young gentleman.

"I have a painful duty to perform," said the constable, hesitatingly; then plucking up his courage he laid his hands on the young man's shoulder, and said quickly: "Valdimir Desparde, I arrest you in the queen's name. You are my prisoner. "

"WHAT!" exclaimed the young man, starting back from the degrading touch, and glaring at the constable with flashing eyes and pallid face—pallid not from fear, but from intense amazement and indignation.

"What in the demon's name is all this about?"

"Will you have the goodness to specify the charge upon which Mr. Desparde is arrested?" haughtily demanded Lord Beaudevere, now firmly believing the warrant for arrest had been issued under some strange and grievous misapprehension.

"Yes, my lord," gravely replied the constable. "We arrest Mr. Desparde on the charge of murder."

"*Murder!*" echoed Lord Beaudevere.

"MURDER!" exclaimed Valdimir Desparde.

They were both too much astonished to add another word.

"Yes, my lord; yes, Mr. Desparde; the murder last night in a railway carriage of a young woman who was his traveling companion on the London and Northwestern Railway," exclaimed the constable.

In an instant the whole truth flashed upon the mind of Valdimir Desparde.

The apparently sleeping, strangely motionless woman who had been his sole companion in the compartment by which he had traveled from the Grand Junction to the Mis-

ton Junction.

He stood confounded, aghast, as much like a detected criminal as a brave and innocent and an honorable man could look.

"In the name of Heaven, Valdimir, what is the meaning of this? I know, of course, that you are as guiltless of that charge as I am myself! I need scarcely tell you that! But what does this mean? Can you throw any light upon this matter at all?" inquired the baron, in great distress.

"I do not know, my lord! I feel like an unconscious sleep-walker caught in a man-trap," answered the young gentleman.

"Was there any woman alone in the carriage with you, then?"

"There was a woman, who was the sole occupant of the carriage into which I was shown by this same conductor," said Valdimir, indicating the man, who responded by a nod," and who seemed to be fast asleep. But whether she were young or middle-aged I really could not say. Her figure and attitude were not those of an old woman."

"How long were you alone with this woman?"

"From midnight until the dawn of day—that is to say, from the time I took the London and Northwestern at the Grand Junction until I changed carriages for Miston—a period of six or seven hours, I should judge."

"And did she sleep all that time?"

"She appeared to sleep most profoundly She never moved one inch all the way. At the Miston Branch I left her in precisely the same attitude in which I had found her when I entered the compartment some hours before at the Grand Junction. I thought it strange at the time that she should have slept so long and so profoundly."

"I beg pardon, my lord! But if I might suggest, having some experience in these cases, I would advise your lordship not to lead the young gentleman on to talk of this affair just at present. He might do himself a mischief," said the constable, good-naturedly.

"Confound you, do you suppose Mr. Desparde has any thing to conceal in this matter?" demanded the baron.

"I don't know, my lord; but I think he had best not make any more admissions. And—pardon me, my lord, but we must be moving on. I don't want to be disrespectful, but I must do my duty," added the officer.

"I think, Baron, that the shortest way out of this difficulty would be to go immedately before a justice of the peace—especially as it seems we have no alternative," said Valdimir, with a laugh.

There was no laughter in Lord Beaudevere's tone as he turned to the constable and inquired:

"Where will you take him?"

"Before Justice Gatton, sir, who issued the warrant, at Yockley, where the murder was first discovered."

"You will go by train?"

"Yes, my lord, by the 10:10 from the Miston Station, and we have not got too much time to catch it."

"Very well, I will go with Mr. Desparde and see him through this misadventure, for it is nothing else. Wait a moment."

Then the baron rang for writing materials and wrote a hasty note to Miss Desparde, telling her that her brother had reached Miston in perfect health and excellent spirits, but that they were both called to Yockley on unexpected business and could not return to Cloudland before evening.

"There!" said the baron, handing the note over to Valdimir Desparde, "I think that will prevent Vivienne from feeling any anxiety on our account, unless she hears the worst from rumor."

"I do not think she will do that. These men have been discreet. Even the waiter that admitted them did not know they bore a warront," replied Desparde.

This was true, and so a few minutes later, Yates, the coachman, was sent back with the carriage to Cloudland and the note to Vivienne Desparde, and Valdimir Desparode, accompanied by his cousin, Lord Beaudevere, was on the train going North, in custody of the constable, without having left any suspicion behind him that the heir of Cloudland had been arrested on the terrible charge of murder.

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## CHAPTER XV

### HOW THE MURDER WAS DISCOVERED

All murders past do stand excused in this—
And this so sole and so unmatchable
Shall prove a deadly bloodshed but a jest,
Exampled by this heinous spectacle.

SHAKESPEARE.

Fearless he sees who is with virtue crowned
The tempest rage and hears the thunder sound—
Ever the same, though fortune smile or frown.

GRANVILLE.

IT WAS inevitable that that the murder of the girl in the railway carriage must have been speedily discovered.

It was broad daylight when the train reached Yockley.

A group of ladies and children stood on the platform waiting to get seats.

The guard, seeing them, and knowing that the "reserved" compartment—"reserved" no longer—was the only vacant one on the train, went and opened the door, put out the lamp, and turned to the new passengers.

"Ladies' carriage, guard," said the matron who appeared to be the mother of the group.

"All right, mum, here you are! Only one lady in the carriage, and no gentlemen. Plenty of room, mum!" answered the official ,lifting the children in one by one, and then assisting two young ladies and finally the matron into the compartment.

The last-mentioned was stout and clumsy, and pitched about for a moment, and then stumbled and fell; but in falling she threw out her hand to save herself, and struck upon the form of poor Kit.

"Something "swashed," as she afterwards described it, like wet clothes in a wash-tub when pressed upon.

She recovered her equilibrium and dropped into her seat; but that of the poor murdered girl had been disturbed, and the body swayed helplessly and sank heavily against the matron, who gave it a vigorous "hunch," as she exclaimed:

"Sit up, my dear! Or *wake* up, if you are asleep—you *scrouge* me!"

But at the same instant the woman looked at her glove, and the young lady on the opposite seat looked on the supposed sleeper, and both awoke the welkin with piercing shrieks, shriek upon shriek, as they burst open the door and sprang tumultuously out of the carriage, followed by the terrified and screaming children.

The whole station was aroused and came crowding to the door of the compartment around the distracted group of women and children.

"What's up! What's up?" demanded the guard, who was the first on the spot.

"Oh! in there! in there!" was all the pale and trembling women could utter.

"It is—it is——" began one of the young girls; but she could get no farther.

"In the compartment—in there! It's dead! It's a corpse!" cried a child of twelve years of age, who seemed to have better possession of her senses than all the rest.

The startled guard entered the carriage—but sprang back as if he had been shot!

He closed and locked the door, and rushed across the track to the office of the station master.

The train was to be delayed for five minutes, and this delay must be telegraphed up and down the road to insure the safety of all on that route.

Then back to the bloody scene, followed by station master, ticket agent, policemen, porters and passengers.

And the compartment was opened and its horrors revealed.

The babel of voices was hushed now!

Some one had taken a door off its hinges and brought it to the spot.

The guard and a constable entered the compartment and raised the body of the unfortunate girl, and bore it out and laid it on the door. Two porters were called to lift it, and while the constable made way through the crowd, it was borne across the track and into the largest room of the railway station.

The carriage containing the fatal compartment was detached from the train, switched off the road and run into a safe place to await the action of the coroner, and the carriages next before and after were run together and locked, and so the sequence was complete again.

Th guard of that train was detained as a witness and another guard was put on duty, and then the trin went on its way.

All this was done with railway celerity and within the stipulated five minutes' grace.

The sun was now above the horizon, and all Yockley—that is to say, the industrious and laboring portion of Yockley—was up and about its business. But little business was done after the news of the murder in the railway carriage was bruited abroad.

The coroner had been promptly summoned, but the crowd gathered before the coroner came.

By order of that officer, the body was removed to the Tawny Lion Tavern, where it was laid out in the large public hall, used often for such purposes in case of railway accidents, and a jury was summoned and impaneled to hold an inquest.

A *post-mortem* examination was ordered by Coroner Locke, and made by Dr. Lewis, the village practitioner, and his assistants, who proved that death had been caused

by a wound through the heart, inflicted by some fine, sharp, three-edger instrument.

The witnesses were Mrs. Bottom, Miss Bottom, and Miss Ann Jane Bottom, who had first discovered the dead body in the carriage, and who, with all the children of their party, had had their journey temporarily interrupted, and were now stopping at the Tawny Lion, in attendance on the inquest.

On a long table, some few feet in front of this one, lay the body of the murdered girl, covered over with a sheet.

One witness, the guard who had been on duty that fatal night, was already called to the stand and undergoing examination.

To the questions of the coroner he answered:

"Name, Thomas Potter; occupation, guard on the London and Northwestern Railway. Was on duty last night."

"Will you tell the jury what you know of this case?" inquired the coroner.

"Yes, sir. Was on duty, as I had the honor of saying, last night. Train left Paddington Station at 3:50. Just before she left observed a gentleman in an ulster, with his black cap pulled down low on his brows; had a lady in a long, waterproof cloak on his arm; was looking for seats and the train about to start. I showed them to an empty compartment, and asked the gentleman if he would like to reserve it, for I thought the two were bride and groom."

"Never mind about your thoughts, guard; let us have the facts," said the coroner.

"Yes, sir. Gentleman *did* reserve the compartment to himself and his companion. I didn't notice the gentleman's face to recognize it then, sir, for the train had not left the station and the light was bad."

"Did you recognize him afterwards?" inquired one of the jurymen.

"Later on, sir, I did; but it was much later on; for, though the gentleman got out at one or two stations, he kept the collar of his coat up and the visor of his cap down, so that I did not recognize him; but really I did not take much notice. It was not until we got to the Grand Junction that I saw him to know him. He got out and went into the refreshment room, and stayed a few min-

utes, and then came out again; and as I opened the door for him he turned down the collar of his ulster and took off his cap, as if he was too warm, and then I saw he was Mr. Valdimir Desparde."

The announcement of this name caused a murmur of surprise throughout the crowd, for the Baron Beaudevere and the heir of Cloudland were known all along this line.

"Are you sure of what you say, witness?" inquired the coroner.

"Perfectly sure, sir! I wish to Heaven I wasn't! I have known Mr. Valdimir Desparde by sight ever since he was a boy. He used to travel by this route many times a year."

"Remember you are under oath."

"I do remember it, sir; and I can swear to the fact that the gentleman who reserved the compartment on my train last night for himself and the young woman who was afterwards found murdered in it, was Mr. Valdimir Desparde and no other, replied the guard.

"And from the time that Mr. Desparde reserved this compartment at Paddington, until the time when the murder was discovered at Yockley Station, did any other person except Mr. Desparde and the young woman who was his companion enter that compartment? inquired the foreman of the jury.

"Not a single soul, sir,"

"How can you be sure of that?"

"Because, the compartment being reserved, I watched it at every station, locked the door when the gentleman came out, and unlocked it again when he wished to come in."

"How was it, then, that you admitted so large a party into this reserved compartment as this one that discovered the murder?" inquired the coroner.

"Because I had missed the gentleman ever since the train left the Miston Junction, and after it had passed several stations I discovered that he was nowhere on board of her. When we reached this station and found a large party of women and children, and not a vacant seat on the train except in that reserved compartment, where there were seven empty, and one occupied only by a sleeping woman, I opened the door and put them into it, and had

scarcely gone ten steps away before they all burst shrieking out of the carriage. The murder was discovered."

Many more questions were put to the guard, without changing the aspect of the old facts as related by him, or eliciting any new ones.

His testimony was very damaging to Valdimir Desparde.

"Miss Ann Jane Bottom, being called upon to testify, went into hysterics and had to be taken out.

Miss Maria Bottom had not noticed anything at all until she was hustled out of the compartment by her screaming mother and sister.

But the inquest was not over yet. The jury wished to examine the inside of the carriage, that up to this moment had remained locked and guarded by a constable.

Way was cleared for them to leave the hall, and they went in a body to the station where the carriage was left.

The compartment was then as thoroughly searched as its shocking condition would permit; but nothing was found in it except a small gold pencil case marked with the initials V. D., and a traveling bag apparently the property of the dead woman.

These things were taken possession of by the coroner and carried back to the hall in the Tawny Lion, where the inquest was resumed.

Then it was thought advisable that the body of the murdered girl should be viewed, that it might if possible be identified by some one.

Accordingly arrangements were made so that the crowd should file in an orderly manner by the right-hand door, pass around the table on which the body was laid, and down and out by the left-hand door.

This procession occupied a full hour.

But among the hundreds of curious people that viewed the body only one recognized it. This was a young man named Edward Hetley, who had once been a railway porter at the Miston Station, since transferred to Yockley.

He identified the body as that of Christelle Ken, the daughter of James Ken, fisherman on the Miston coast.

When the inspection was over and all the testimony taken, the coroner summed up the evidence.

He was a plain, straightforward man, this village coroner, and his speech was brief and to the point.

The case was a very simple one, he said, and would give the jury but little trouble.

The "intelligent jury" consulted about ten minutes, and returned a verdict in accordance with the evident facts of the case, to the effect that—

"The deceased, Christelle Ken, came to her death through a wound in the heart, inflicted by a sharp-pointed instrument held in the hands of Valdimir Desparde."

As soon as the verdict was made known, the magistrate present, Mr. George Gatton, issued a warrant for the apprehension of Valdimir Desparde, and dispatched a constable, accompanied by the railway guard, to Miston for the purpose of executing it.

At the same time a notification of his daughter's death was sent to James Ken.

When the hall was cleared of men, the women of the house were admitted to it. They brought with them hot water and clean white clothing to prepare the remains of poor Kit for the coffin in which it was to be sent to her friends.

The women, when they had done their work, silently covered it over and withdrew from the hall, leaving it in perfect order.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### VALDIMIR DESPARDE'S EXAMINATION

No change comes o'er his steadfast brow,
  Though ruin is around him;
His eye-beam burns as proudly now
  As if the laurel crowned him. CHILD.

He, undismayed
And calm, can meet his coming destiny
In all its pleasing or appalling shapes.
WATTS.

AT the baron's request, and, therefore, of course, at the baron's expense, the Yockley constable had taken a whole

compartment for the accommodation of his party on the train that left the Miston Station for Miston Junction at 10:10 that morning.

At the Junction where they changed carriages for Yockley he had done the same thing on the same terms, thus securing privacy for his party, and protecting them from the glances and the comments of any fellow-passengers.

It was twelve o'clock when they reached the Yockley Station, where, to their great annoyance, they found a large crowd assembled.

Seeing the multitude, the constable sent the guard out alone to engage a closed cab.

When this was done the party alighted quietly, entered the cab, and were driven off, unsuspected by the mob.

Meanwhile, the cab containing the party was driven rapidly towards the suburbs of the village and through a piece of woods to "Gatton's Hope," the seat of Joseph Gatton, Esq., one of the justices of the peace for the shire, and before whom the preliminary examination was to be held.

They drove up a winding avenue that led through the grass-grown and sparsely wooded park, and drew up before a substantial gray stone house of three stories, with three rows of windows on the front and a broad pair of doors in the middle of the lower front.

The constable and the guard alighted first, followed closely by Lord Beaudevere and Mr. Desparde.

The constable knocked and the door was immediately opened, and the whole party was at once admitted by a footman in waiting, who led them to a large room in the rear of the hall, known as the Justice Room. and furnished with oaken book cases filled with law literature, stout oaken benches and chairs and a long table, placed crosswise at the farthest end, covered with green cloth and laden with law books, blank books, and stationery of every description.

Behind this table, in three high-backed chairs, sat three men. The one in the middle was Squire Gatton, a tall, thin, florid-faced, red-haired and red-bearded man, with a careworn but not unkind face.

On his right was a brother magistrate, Burke of Burke-

hurst, a typical old-fashioned, round-bodied, bull-necked, bullet-headed country squire.

Near them sat Coroner Locke, who had conducted the first inquest at the Tawny Lion Tavern.

Seated in chairs at some little distance in front of the table were the witnesses that had been summoned—Mrs. Bottom and her two daughters, who had first discovered the murder, and Dr. Lowe and his two assistants, who had made the *post-mortem* examination.

Waiting about the room were several bailiffs.

The constable, walking in advance of his party, handed the warrant to Mr. Gatton with a bow, and announced the prisoner in a low tone, and then fell back among the other officers in waiting.

Squire Gatton raised his eyes, and seeing Lord Beaudevere, with whom he had some slight acquaintance, standing by the prisoner, and knowing his relationship to Valdimis Desparde, colored with sympathetic shame as he arose and held out his hand across the table, saying:

"How do you do, my lord? I cannot say that I am glad to see your lordship here. I am extremely sorry. This is a most painful affair."

"It *would* be 'a most painful affair' if it were not so exquisitely absurd! The idea of Mr. Valdimir Desparde being arrested upon such a charge, under any possible circumstances, is so very preposterous that even the fact that he has but just landed on the shores of England, after a nearly seven months' absence, can add nothing to its outrageous absurdity!" said the baron, in a tone of sarcasm, slightly dashed with indignation, as he took the offered hand of the magistrate and dropped it again.

"I hope it will turn out to have been a mistake, my lord," replied the latter, and he bowed now in return to the bow of Mr. Desparde.

"You *'hope?'* Why, you must know it will! But let me ask one favor of you, Mr. Gatton: that you will proceed with the case at once and get through with it as quickly as possible. Mr. Desparde, as I had the honor of telling you before, has just returned from abroad and has not as yet had the opportunity of seeing any of his relatives or friends except myself. He is naturally anxious to greet his sister, and also—*hem!*—

'A nearer one yet and dearer one.'

Consider that, Mr. Gatton, and let us off as soon as you can," said the baron, lightly.

"I will do so, Lord Beaudevere. Pray be seated," replied the magistrate.

The baron and his young cousin sat down in chairs pointed out by a bailiff.

The magistrate immediately took up the warrant, glanced over it, and said:

"Mr. Valdimir Desparde."

The young gentleman arose and walked up to the table.

"You are herein charged with having, on the night of Wednesday, December the fifteenth, in a compartment of a railway carriage on the London and Northwestern Railway, assaulted and killed one Christelle Ken, a young woman of Miston, by stabbing her through the heart with some sharp-pointed instrument. What have you to say to this charge?"

"Why, that it is utterly false and ridiculous. I do not even know the girl in question, and could have no reason whatever for wishing to injure her," replied Valdimir Desparde, with a slight smile, for notwithstanding the gravity of the surroundings he could not help feeling as if that terrible charge made against himself was really too monstrous in its absurdity to merit a serious response.

"I hope that you may be able to disprove the charge, sir. I do, with all my soul," said the magistrate, solemnly.

"Oh, bring on your witnesses, Mr. Gatton, and let us have this farce over," said Lord Beaudevere, impatiently.

The magistrate bowed, and signaled his clerk, who called out:

"Thomas Potter!"

The railway guard left his seat and came and stood before the table.

The guard gave the same astounding evidence that he furnished to the coroner's jury. The guard was followed by the Bottoms, who, in turn, were succeeded by the man who had identified the body.

The evidence of the pencil with the initials V. D. was also exploited.

This closed the evidence against the accused.

Then the magistrate turning towards the prisoner, said, very gravely:

"Mr. Desparde, you have heard the testimony upon which you have been charged with the murder of the young woman, one Christelle Ken. What have you now to show in rebuttal of this testimony?"

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## CHAPTER XVII

### THE RESULT

Had it pleased Heaven
To try me with afflictions; had He rained
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head;
Steeped me in poverty to the very lips;
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some part of my soul,
A drop of patience; but, alas! to make me
A fixéd figure for the hand of scorn
To point her slow, unmoving finger at!

SHAKESPEARE.

Come! Rouse thee now! I know thy mind,
And would its strength awaken!
Proud, gifted, ardent, noble, kind—
Strange thou shouldst be so shaken!

ANNA PEYRES DINNIES.

VALDIMIR DESPARDE arose, bowed slightly and said:

"Squire Gatton, I have really scarcely given this accusation any serious attention. Terrible as it certainly is, it seems much too preposterous, as applied to myself, to be entertained for a single instant.

"I know nothing whatever of this unfortunate girl whom I am accused of having murdered, never having seen her face, to my knowledge, in the whole course of my life.

"I have been in the United States for the last seven months and returned to England only yesterday. I had best perhaps give you a succinct account of my movements from the hour of my landing.

"I landed by the steamer *Colorado,* from New York on

the third, at Southampton, at five o'clock yesterday morning. Immediately after leaving the ship I went to a telegraph office and dispatched a telegram to my cousin here to send some vehicle to meet me at the Miston Station at seven this morning."

"Which I duly received and acted upon. Little time left for him to plan and execute a midnight murder, I should judge!" put in Lord Beaudevere.

"I did not lose more than an hour in the town; but after a hasty breakfast at the counter of the refreshment room, I took the six-seven train of the London and Southwestern Railway with a through ticket in conjunction with the Northwestern, and came straight on until I reached the Grand Junction."

"Where that *other* fellow, the real assassin—perdition catch him—jumped off the *other* train and made his escape, leaving his trap empty for Desparde to run his unlucky head into?" exclaimed the baron.

"I think my cousin, Lord Beaudevere, is quite right in his theory of this case, Squire Gatton and gentlemen. At any rate I got out of my train at the Grand Junction, and in crossing over to the other one I certainly met a party dressed exactly as I was dressed, in the same sort of long, black ulster, down to his heels, with its high collar turned up to his temples, and the same sort of black, slouched hat pulled down over his eyes. Casting the eyes of my memory back upon this man, I see that he was of the same height and figure as myself, and might by a casual observer, have been mistaken for me. He was hurrying towards the Southampton down-train that was just in."

"*That* was the very fellow. He had done his dastardly deed, and was just making his escape to the seaport to get out of the country!" triumphantly exclaimed the baron.

His theory seemed to strike the magistrate and his assistants favorably. They looked at each other and nodded.

"Go on, if you please, Mr. Desparde," said Squire Gatton.

"As I approached the Northwestern train I perceived a guard, whom I knew by sight—Thomas Potter, who has testified against me in this case—standing by the door of the middle compartment in a first-class carriage, precisely as though he were waiting for some one to come up——"

"Waiting for that other fellow, of course," put in the irrepressible baron.

"He hailed me somewhat familiarly, as though he expected me, or some one whom he took me to be."

"Of course he did! took you to be the other fellow, confound them both!" interpolated the excited baron.

"What did he say to you? How did he address you—by your own or any other name?" inquired Mr. Gatton.

Valdimir Desparde reflected for a moment, and then answered, though with some hesitation still:

"N-no, I think he used no name. He hailed me, I think, with 'All right, sir! Here you are! Look sharp, sir, if you please! She's off,' or words to that effect. I, thinking the man had either recognized me, as I certainly had him, or else that he was taking unusual pains to secure a passenger his seat, hastened my steps and got into the compartment. Then the guard added these words—very significant to me, in the light of what has happened since, though at the moment I supposed he merely referred to his catching sight of me coming towards the train, recognizing me as an old acquaintance and being anxious to secure me a seat—he said, in fact, this: 'All right *now!* I waited for you; but I really was afraid you would miss it this time!' And he shut the door and the train started."

"Of course, he waited for the other fellow who had committed the crime in that compartment and run away! He took you for the other fellow. It is all as clear as daylight! Or else—or else—and by my life, the point is worth considering—he was in complicity with the other, and caught you in this trap to favor his escape!" exclaimed the baron.

All within hearing were quite startled by this new view of the case.

The magistrate and his colleague whispered together.

Things were beginning to look shady for the principal witness in this case.

In fact, Valdimir Desparde's clear and simple story of his own movements since he arrived in England, together with the running comments of Lord Beaudevere, had made an impression on all present, which was much deepened by the last weighty suggestion of the baron.

Squire Gatton and Burke of Burkehurst continued to

converse for a few minutes longer, though in so low a tone that no one could hear the purport of their conversation.

At length, however, the magistrate straightened himself up and said:

"Will Mr. Desparde now proceed with his narrative?"

Valdimir Desparde bowed and continued:

"I come now to the most important part of my story. I entered the compartment, as I said, just as the train started. I observed that the light of the lamp was turned down. At first, in the gloom, I saw no one, and naturally supposed that I was alone. I reached to put up the light, and, in doing so, heard something drop. I stooped to see what had fallen, but could not find anything; raised myself again to put up the light, but was arrested by the sight of a woman, wrapped closely up in a dark cloak, and reclining in a corner. Her face was turned sidewise, and covered with a thick, black veil. She was apparently sound asleep. Thinking that this woman had turned down the light to favor her own slumbers, I left it as she had put it, and took my seat on the opposite side in the corner diagonally across from her own, so that I might not in any way disturb her repose. I forebore to search for what I had dropped, putting off doing so for a more convenient time, when my unknown companion should be awake. Then I forgot all about it, having more important subjects to think of. Afterwards I missed my gold pencil case, which had become in some way detached from my chain. This would seem a trifling detail, Squire, but that it accounts for my pencil case being found in that compartment."

"Of course it does. Mark that, gentlemen," observed the baron.

"The woman continued to sleep, and I, never suspecting that hers was the sleep of death, lapsed into reverie until the train stopped at one of the principal stations, where the guard came to the door and civilly offered his services to fetch anything from the refreshment room that I wished. I told him that I wanted nothing. He then asked if the 'lady'—meaning my fellow-passenger—would like anything. I replied that she appeared to be asleep."

"While the guard yet stood at the door of the compartment a party came up to get on the train, and asked if it was engaged. He answered 'Yes,' shut the door quickly,

and conveyed them off to some other carriage before I could call after him to tell him that there was a plenty of room inside, and the train started again."

"That infernal scoundrel had entrapped *you* into that compartment, and he meant to take every precaution to fix the murder on you in order to secure the escape of the real assassin! Squire, I hope you will issue a warrant for the arrest of Thomas Potter!" exclaimed Lord Beaudevere, growing more excited.

"I will consider your counsel, my, lord, and in the meantime, we we would like to hear Mr. Desparde go on with his statement," said the magistrate, by way of a gentle reminder that the accused man had the floor for the present.

"The woman slept on and I relapsed into thought. The train stopped at several more stations. I got out at one or two to stretch my limbs, but my companion never awoke, nor ever changed her position."

Here Squire Burke of Burkehurst leaned forward and opened his mouth for about the first time during the examination, and said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Desparde, but by this time did not the long and profound sleep of this woman, who never even once changed her position, as even the soundest sleepers are wont to do, appear unnatural to you, so as to excite some suspicion in your mind?"

"At last it did; but it was a suspicion of alcohol or opium intoxication, or stupor, certainly no suspicion of murder, or even of suicide," replied Valdimir Desparde.

"That is all. Thanks. Proceed, if you please, sir," said Squire Burke, sinking back into his easy chair and easier silence.

Valdimir Desparde resumed:

"This state of things continued in the compartment until daylight, by which time the train had reached the Miston Branch Station, where I got off to take the Miston Special. For the first time since I had taken the train I missed seeing my too attentive guard, who must have been held in temporary thralldom by some exacting passenger, or he would certainly have been on hand. I left the motionless woman in the compartment, wondering carelessly how long she would sleep, and I hurried across the plat-

forms to take the other train, which I secured just as it steamed out of the station. I came on to Miston without adventure of any sort, and was met at that place by my cousin here."

"Yes, sir; and he looked as little like a man who had just committed a midnight murder as it is possible to conceive," added Lord Beaudevere.

"That is all I have to tell—all, indeed, that there is to be told of my movements since my return from abroad. And now I would like to have Thomas Potter, the railway guard, recalled and confronted with me here," concluded Mr. Desparde, as he bowed and resumed his seat.

"Officer, call Thomas Potter," said the magistrate.

THOMAS POTTER!" called the bailiff, in a stentorian voice.

The railway guard, who had been in the "justice room" all the time, and had heard every word that had been said in his disfavor, now came forward, not a whit discomposed by the suspicion that had been cast upon him. He was an honest and a fearless man, as times go. At least he had nothing to do with the assassination in the railway carriage, and the consciousness that he had not supported him.

The guard stoutly adhered to the testimony already given that he recognized the companion of the murdered woman to be Valdimir Desparde. No cross-examination could shake him.

In the face of the evidence so far given, Judge Gatton was obliged, much against his wish, to commit the unfortunate young man for trial at the assizes, without bail.

Then our hero was hurried off to a cell. Lord Beaudevere followed, explained that as his young relative was only waiting trial, he wished to have him made as comfortable as possible, and that they were willing to pay for all lawful accommodations.

The warden replied that he would be glad to talk to his lordship on the subject next morning, but that now the hour had come when the prison doors were about to be closed for the night.

Lord Beaudevere bowed to the inevitable, wrung his young cousin's hand, and departed.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A STORM OF TROUBLE

The billows swell, the winds are high,
Clouds overcast my wintry sky;
Out of the depths to Thee I call,
My fears are great, my strength is small.

Oh, thou the pilot's part perform,
And guard and guide me through the storm,
Defend me from each threatened ill,
Control the waves—say, "Peace, be still."

Amidst the roaring of the sea,
My soul still hangs her hope on Thee;
Thy constant love, benignant care,
Is all that saves me from despair.

COWPER.

"WHEN is the next train for the Miston Branch Junction?" inquired the baron of the cabman, as he issued from the prison doors, leaving his unfortunate young cousin behind him.

"At six-thirty," replied the man, springing off his box, and opening the cab door for his lordship.

"I will pay you an extra half-crown if you catch it," said the baron, as he sprang into the cab and took his seat.

The driver closed the door, climbed to his box, and set his horses off at a brisk trot.

Passing through the village towards the station they overtook a sad procession—James Ken, the fisherman, walking beside a slowly-moving hearse that evidently contained the coffin of his unhappy daughter, on its way to the same train which his lordship was trying to catch.

Notwithstanding the haste he was in, the baron ordered the cabman to pull up.

Then he put down the window and hailed the fisherman:

"Ken, step this way, if you please."

James Ken was a huge, broad-shouldered, red-haired,

ruddy-faced man, clothed in a blue tweed jacket and trousers, and an oilskin hat, and he walked heavily, with his head held down in a very dejected manner.

"Get in here, Ken, and ride with me. I wish to talk with you," said the baron, as the fisherman approached him.

Ken touched his hat, and looked as if he did not understand the invitation.

"I also am going to the Miston train; get in and ride with me, or you will miss it. You had better order the hearseman to drive a little faster also," said the baron, pushing open the cab door.

The poor fisherman, too much obsorbed in his grief to make any objection, or hold any argument, got into the cab, and sat down as far from the baron on the seat as the limited space would allow.

The latter gave the order and the cab went on, followed by the hearse.

"This is a very sad affair, Ken. I deeply sympathize with you," said the baron.

The man burst out crying, and sobbed like a child.

"'Sad' beant the wurrud, my lord," said Ken, as soon as he could use his voice, through his tears. "It—it—moight be called 'sad' if we lost a bairn in the nat'rel way, though we knowed the Lord tuk it straight to heaven; but to hev moy pore gell murdered loike this——"

Here the man's voice broke down in sobs.

Lord Beaudevere looked on in silence. He could find nothing to say to grief like this.

"It is—it is—tarrible, my lord! It is orrful! Orrful!"

"I know it! I feel it, Ken! I wish I could do something for you. If there be any way in the world, Ken, to which I can help you, I shall be glad to do it," said the baron, gently.

"I thank yo, my lord; I know yo wud. Your goodness be known to the country-side."

"Then let me know what I can do for you, Ken."

"Yo cannot do naught, my lord. Nobbut He above," said the man, reverently bowing his head—"nobbut He above can help me. It's a gret sorrow, my lord—a gret sorrow. And the mither! Oh, the mither!"

"She takes it pretty hard, then?"

"She dunnot know the warst yet. She thinks—the mither do—thet the lass deed a nat'rel deeth. If I cud keep it from her, my lord, she shud never know other ways."

"Try to keep it from her, Ken," said the baron.

"No use, my lord. The neebor fowke are sure to foind out all aboot it, and they wud be fain to burst it on her sudden, and thet wud kill the mither. No, my lord, Oi must put it to her moyself as easy as Oi can. Oi'm thinking it mun kill her anyways."

"Ken," whispered the baron, "have you any cause to suspect any particular person of this great crime?"

"Ay, my lord, an' it's more than suspeck I do! Oi *know* who killed moy gell!" replied the man, as his whole honest face darkened in deep wrath.

"Who do you think it was, Ken?" inquired Lord Beaudevere.

The man looked into his lordship's eyes with a peculiar expression of malignity and answered:

"It wur him Oi mean to bring to the gallows if it teks all moy loife and all my means to do it."

"Would you mind telling me whom you suspect, or know it to be, then, Ken?"

"No, Oi dunnot moind! Who wud it be but thet grend vilyun—begging your lordship's pardon for the word—thet Muster Brendon Corle! Who but him wot woiled moy gell away under a false marriage, and then wanted to make way with her to marry the gret leddy up to the castle? Ou, ay! Oi hev heard all about it, my lord. The whole country-side be ringing with it. It wur him, my lord."

"I think so too! I certainly think so too! Do you know whom they have accused of this murder, Ken?"

"Ay, my lord! Oi know they hev tried to put it on a gentleman as innocent of it as Oi am moyself, your lordship. Wot hed *he* to do with slaying moy gell? Oi dunnot believe he even knowed her by soight."

"I am sure he did not. But, Ken, do you know anything of the movements of this fellow Coyle?"

"*Me* know of his movements, my lord? No, my lord, Oi dunnot. If Oi did know where he was this present toime he should be in jail or in burning brimstone before morning!" said the man, in a deep, wrathful tone.

"Will you tell me all you know of this affair between Coyle and your daughter, Ken?" gently requested the baron.

"Oi'd tell yo if Oi *did* know, my lord. But Oi dunnot know no more'n your lordship and all the country-side knows, and not so mooch, mebby. All Oi know be just wot kem at t' old 'arll's will-reading, up at t' castle. It is loike a menny knows more'n Oi do."

The cab was just drawing up before the railway station, and the cabman sprang down from his seat and opened the door.

The baron alighted, followed by the fisherman.

"Oi thank your lordship humbly, for your kindness to me," said the latter. "Oi ought to tell yor lordship how mooch good it did me—how Oi needed it. Yo see, my lord, Oi cud hardly stand, mooch less walk, wen yo tuk me oop. Eh, my lord, wot hae happened to *her* tuk all the power and strength out o' moy limbs, able-bodied mon as Oi was."

"You were very welcome, Ken. I was very glad to help you," returned the baron, as he put his hand in his pocket and drew out his portmonnaie to pay the cabman.

They saw by the railway clock over the door of the station that they had still ten minutes to spare.

When the baron had settled with the cabman he still held his portmonnaie in his hand. He knew how poor this man Ken really was; how ill he could afford the expenses that he was now incurring, yet he hesitated to do what his kind and simple heart prompted—to offer Ken pecuniary assistance—for he knew and respected the honest pride of this man.

At this moment the hearse that had followed the cab at a short distance behind arrived and drew up.

"Oi wish yor lordship good-day. Oi mun go and see it put on the freight van," said Ken, touching his hat and moving towards the hearse.

This motion brought the baron to a quick decision.

"Hi! Ken! Here! One moment!" he called after the retreating man.

Ken touched his hat to his lordship and came back.

"Ken, the highest authority in the universe tell us that 'all men are brethren.' We know it to be true, and when trouble comes then we feel it to be true. And, Ken,

brethren should help one another, and I know if I happened to fall overboard from my boat, and you were near, you would fish me out and save my life—wouldn't you, now!"

"Sartain my lord; it would be moy duty and moy pleasure," answered the man, staring a little with wonder at what this could have to do with the affairs of the present.

"Very well, then, Ken. I hope, as you are in deep water now, you will let me help you out," said the baron, putting a closely-folded bank note for ten pounds in the hands of the man.

"But, moy lord, moy lord——" began Ken, looking from the face of the baron down upon the note in his hand, which he refused to close upon it.

"Now, Ken, my friend, we have got no time to argue the point. Do you think if I were in deep water, and you from your boat held out your hand to me, that I would hesitate to take it? Come, Ken, put up that note and be off to the freight van."

"Yor lordship knows how to help a poor man without humbling him. Oi——" began the fisherman, but the baron cut him short with:

"No better than you do yourself, Ken! There! Say no more about it."

"God bless your lordship!" exclaimed the grateful man, as he hurried away, muttering to himself: "And there's a man wot won't marry and send doon his goodness in sons and darters to bless futur generations. Wot wud Oi hev done if the Lord hedn't put it into his haart to help me. Oi never asked help of any in moy loife, and wud hev deed sooner!"

The immediate business upon which he had come now claimed his attention. He had just money enough in small change to pay the charge of his sad freight and buy a third-class ticket for himself.

At Miston he would have to change his bank note to meet other expenses.

Meanwhile, Lord Beaudevere went to the railway station telegraph office and dispatched a telegram to Mr. Reynolds Fox, Scotland Yard Yard, London, asking that experienced detective to meet him at the Yockley prison the next afternoon.

Having done this, his lordship hurried to the ticket office and there, feeling disinclined for any company, engaged a compartment for himself.

He had scarcely taken his seat before the train started.

It was now quite dark, and he leaned back in his seat and gave himself up to thought.

The defense of his young cousin occupied all his attention. He felt convinced in his own mind that Brandon Coyle was the murderer of Christelle Ken, and whether he should succeed in getting any magistrate to give a warrant for the arrest of that criminal or not, he was determined upon one course—to employ the best detectives that could be procured to look up and follow up Mr. Brandon Coyle, and investigate his antecedents for the last few months. In this manner he hoped to collect evidence enough against him to compel his arrest and—to vindivate Valdimir Desparde.

The only difficulty and danger lay in the shortness of the time. There were only two weeks to the coming of the Assizes! In those two weeks all would have to be accomplished that could be done to save Valdimir Desparde.

The baron resolved to begin work at once.

As the train rushed on through the darkness he thought over all the evidence already in his hands against Brandon Coyle—his intimacy with the deceased girl, Christelle Ken, during her life; his false and secret marriage with her; his supposed abduction of her; his attempted marriage with Lady Arielle Montjoie, foiled at the last moment by a letter from the betrayed girl; his burning rage against her —all these forming strong incentives to her murder.

Lord Beaudevere resolved to lay these facts, if necessary, before every magistrate in the county until he could secure a warrant for Brandon Coyle's apprehension, and, in the meantime, keep his private detectives at work.

It was ten o'clock when the train reached Miston.

Lord Beaudevere got out and found his old coachman, with the brougham, waiting for him.

Lord Beaudevere entered it and took his seat, and the coachman climbed to his box and started his horses.

Three hours' ride through the middle of the winter night brought Lord Beaudevere home to Cloudland at the unearthly hour of one o'clock in the morning.

Lord Beaudevere alighted and ran up the steps of his house at the same moment that the tired coachman turned his horses' heads towards the stables.

"Is Miss Desparde still up?" inquired the baron, without reflecting how unnecessary was the question.

"Yes, my lord," replied the porter, in a low, respectful tone as he stepped to the left and threw open the door of the drawing room, from which Vivienne flew to meet him.

She was in full evening dress of ruby velvet, point lace and pearls, all of which well become the rich, dark, brunette type of her beauty.

She scarcely greeted Beaue, but looked eagerly to the right and left and behind him, as she inquired:

"Where is he? Why don't he come in?"

"He will be here soon, my dear," replied the baron, who had taken off his traveling cap, and was now, with the assistance of his valet, drawing off his heavy ulster.

"What has he stopped for? Where has he gone? To the stables? And I waiting for him here! How stupid of him! Men are so provoking!" exclaimed Vivienne, flying to the hall door, flinging it wide open and looking out into the night.

"Come, come in, my dear; you will take cold," said the baron, as he passed at once into the drawing room.

Vivienne closed the door ad possed into the drawing room, inquiring:

"When will you be ready for supper, Beaue?"

"As soon as I have changed my dress—in twenty minutes," replied the baron.

Lord Beaudevere went upstairs.

Lord Beaudevere was seized with a fit of moral cowardice, and therefore he prolonged his toilet as far as possible, by taking a full bath, a fresh shave, and a thorough "shampooing."

But loiter as he would, not being a lady, he *could* not drag his dressing through more than half an hour. Then he reluctantly went down to face Vivienne, who was walking excitedly up and down the drawing room.

"Pray, Beaue, are you going to be married by special license to-night, that you make such an elaborate toilet? You remind one of Harry Hotspur's fop—

'Fresh as a bridegroom,' "

said Vivienne, sarcastically, as he came in.

"My dear, I was very dusty," evasively replied the baron.

"And that boy of ours has not yet come in from the stables! It is *too* aggravating!" exclaimed Vivienne.

The baron made no reply. He did not know what to say.

"I wish you would send for him, Beaue! Do you know that it is near two o'clock in the morning now? And he will require some time to make himself presentable—after his long journey and—the stables! Send for him at once, Beaue!"

"My dear, he is not at the stables," said the baron.

"Not at the stables!" echoed Vivienne.

"Certainly not, my dear! What put it in your head that he was there?"

"*You* did, Beaue! You said that he had gone around to the stables with the coachman and carriage to look at the horses! Now, if he is not at the stables, *where* is he?" demanded Vivienne, beginning to grow anxious.

"My dear, you have deceived yourself! I certainly could never have told you that Valdimir had gone around to the stables."

"Where *is* he, then?" almost fiercely demanded the girl.

"You see, you took it for granted that he had gone around to the stables, and now you imagine that I told you so," continued the baron, trying to gain time.

Vivienne made a gesture of impatience, exclaiming:

"Never mind what I imagined, or what I took for granted, Beaue. Tell me where my brother is, and why he did not come with you? Has any accident happened to him? Is he hurt? Is he ill? *What* is the matter, Beaue?" she demanded, growing white.

"Don't alarm yourself, my dear. Valdimir is alive and well, and no accident has happened to him, unless you would call robbery an accident," replied the baron.

"Robbery!" exclaimed Vivienne, in astonishment.

"Yes, my dear, robbery! He is detained by a robbery (the robbery of his good name)," mentally added the baron.

"But I don't understand. Who has robbed him?" inquired the disappointed and bewildered girl.

"I—he—we——" stammered the baron—"that is, we think it may have been the railway guard. (Certainly it was the guard who accused him and took away his good name)," mentally added the baron in an aside.

"But—dear me!—what has he lost? Anything of so much importance as to detain him on his journey home?" inquired Vivienne, uneasily.

"Yes, my dear, the most valuable piece of property he has in the world. A rare jewel, worth more than the whole of Cloudland put together," replied the baron—("his good name,") he added mentally.

"But--I do not understand. Where did Valdimir get such a jewel?"

"It was one of his hereditary family jewels. (So it was —the inheritance of an untarnished name)," mentally added the baron.

"But how careless of Valdimir to carry such a jewel about him!" exclaimed Vivienne.

The baron made no reply to this.

"And he thinks the guard has stolen it?"

"I think there is no doubt of it."

"What steps has my brother taken to recover his property?"

"He has gone back to Yockley, where he first missed it," replied the baron.

"How provoking! And I really care a great deal more about the delay of my brother's home-coming than I do about the loss of the jewel. How long do you suppose this unlucky affair will detain him?" anxiously inquired the girl.

"It is uncertain; some days, I fear—some weeks possibly. He may have to go farther than Yockley in pursuit of his lost property (to the other world, indeed, if the worst should happen)," mentally added Lord Beaudevere, with a fearful darkening of his own mind.

"It is a great disappointment, Beaue, dear; but come in to supper. We have waited long enough," said Vivienne.

The baron gave her his arm and they passed into the dining room and took their places at the table, where presently the footman in attendance served oysters on the half

shell, then fresh venison steaks on chafing dishes, and other light dainties.

Soon after supper the guardian and ward prepared to retire—one very much disappointed, the other very anxious.

As they were about to bid each other good-night, the baron said:

"I only returned here, my love, to relieve your anxiety. I must go back to Yockley to-morrow morning to help Valdimir recover his property. I shall probably start before you are up in the morning; but you must not be uneasy, for I shall return at night."

"And bring Valdimir with you?"

"Why, certainly! Of course! If he shall have recovered his property in the meantime."

And so they separated for the night—Vivienne very sleepy in spite of her disappointment, and Lord Beaudevere very wide awake in spite of his weariness.

It was now three o'clock in the morning, but instead of going to bed the baron dispatched his valet to the library for writing materials, and when they were brought dismissed the man and sat down and wrote two letters, addressed to two eminent counselors at law on that circuit.

When he had sealed and stamped them he put them carefully in the pocket of his coat to mail as he should pass through Miston on his way to the railway station.

Then he lay down to take a short rest.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THAT SECRET

The clouds may rest on the present,
  And sorrow on days that are gone,
But no night is so utterly cheerless
  That we may not look for the dawn;
And there is no human being
  With so wholly dark a lot,
But the heart by turning the picture,
  May find some sunny spot.

PHEBE CARY.

VERY early the next morning the baron arose, rung for his valet, ordered a cup of coffee and a roll to be brought to him in his dressing room, and the horses to be put to the brougham and brought round to take him to the station.

By seven o'clock he was seated in his carriage rolling towards Miston Station.

By very rapid driving and fresh horses he made the distance in two hours and a half, and reached the station at half past nine, in time to catch the train for the Junction.

Leaving his letters with his coachman to post, and orders to put up for the day at the Dolphin, and meet him at the nine-fifty special, he jumped aboard the car and started on his journey.

No sooner was the train off than a frightful anxiety seized him. It was lest Vivienne Desparde should see in the morning papers some account of the railroad compartment tragedy in conjunction with her brother's name. He had intended to stop at the news agent's in Miston who furnished the hall with papers, and leave orders that they should be withheld until his return in the evening, when he would call for them himself; but in the hurry of catching the train he had forgotten to do this, and now he was a prey to the most tormenting uneasiness.

If Vivienne should suddenly discover the truth through the newspaper WHAT might not be the consequences of its effect upon her sensitive and highly-strung organization.

Lord Beaudevere dared not answer the question to himself.

He wished now that he had had the moral courage to break the news gently to the sister by softening all the circumstances as much as possible, rather than have exposed her to the danger of hearing a garbled and exaggerated account of the arrest and accusation of her brother through some gossiping newspaper or neighbor.

He was horribly exercised over this danger. He would gladly have turned back to remedy his own forgetfulness about stopping the papers; but the railway train held him fast and whirled him forward relentlessly as destiny.

It was half-past twelve when he reached Yockley.

There at the station he took the same cab that he had engaged on the day before, and drove out to the jail.

After the usual formula he was admitted to see his cousin.

He found Valdimir in a small cell of seven feet by four, with bare pine floor, bare whitewashed walls, and a high, grated window. There was no furniture but a cot bed, and no recommendation about the spot but its extreme cleanliness.

The young man was seated on the side of his cot engaged in reading the morning paper, for which he had sent out and purchased through the civility of one of the turnkeys.

He looked up, immediately arose, laid aside the paper, greeted his kinsman, and made room for him to sit down on the side of the cot.

"Is that the morning's *Times?*" inquired the baron, as he too kthe indicated seat.

"Yes, but there is nothing in it about the murder except a few lines in the telegraphis dispatcthes announcing the fact. My name is not used," replied the young man.

"Glad of it!"

"But it will all be out to-morrow."

Beaue looked around upon the bareness of the place and shuddered.

"Great Heaven! my boy, cannot you have more comforts than these bare walls and floor?" were the next words uttered by the baron, as he surveyed the cell.

"Well, yes, I suppose so, if I pay for them; but I really

miss nothing. I have come from a long sea voyage, remember, Beaue," replied the young man, composedly.

"Yes, but—I never saw such a bare place! I had no idea a prison cell was so destitute of all comforts!" ruefully exclaimed the baron.

Here Valdimir could not refrain from laughing as he answered:

"My dear Beaue, I fancy that 'comfort' is about the last thing that would be considered in prison building and furnishing."

"But—where do you wash your face and brush your hair? I see no conveniences for anything! Absolutely nothing but this cot bed in this bare cell! Where do you wash?"

"There is a room at the end of this corridor used by all the prisoners on this floor. It is very clean. That is a consolation."

"Humph! You don't mean to say that you wash and dress in company with——

"Dear Beaue, what does *that* detail matter, under the circumstances?"

"Well, I must try to get the warden to transfer you to a larger cell."

"I think they are all of one size and pattern," laughed Valdimir.

"I don't see how you can make so light of such a heavy misfortune! And, anyway, we must get a piece of carpet to cover these bare boards, and a curtain to that window and a little stand and table put in."

"Not worth while, Beaue, for the short time I shall stay here. The Assizes are near at hand. I shall soon be tried and acquitted, and then, you know, I shall enjoy the luxuries of carpets, curtains, tables, chairs, perfumes, privacy, liberty, and so on, and so on, all the more for having been deprived of them so long."

"You feel confident of an acquittal, then, Valdimir?"

"Perfectly. It is only a question of a little time. We have only to hunt up my fellow-passengers from Southampton to the Grand Junction, to prove that I could not have been at Paddington at the time that mistaken guard swore that I engaged the reserved compartment from him. You must set detectives at that work, Beaue."

"I telegraphed yesterday to Fox, of Scotland Yard, to meet me here to-day. I shall put the whole care of hunting up the witnesses in his hands—and also that of tracing the murderer. I know who that caitiff is, my boy!"

"You do?" exclaimed the young man.

"Certainly, most certainly, even as if I had seen the crime committed! Did I not hint as much at the preliminary examination?"

"My dear Beaue, whom do you suspect, then?" anxiously inquired the young man.

"I suspect no one. I *know* that Brandon Coyle was the assassin of Christelle Ken, and so, also, does her unhappy father know it!"

"Why, then, did you not accuse him?"

"I fear we have not yet grounds sufficient to convince a magistrate, although we have much more than enough to assure ourselves. Ah! my boy, you know, and it has often been shown, that the strongest possible moral and mental conviction is not legal evidence. We must get more facts against Mr. Brandon Coyle, and in order to do so we must put the case in the skillful hands of Fox and his associates."

"And have you thought of what counsel we shall employ?" inquired Desparde.

"Certainly; I have written to Stair and Turner, two of the most eminent lawyers in the kingdom, and both on this circuit. They will meet me here to-day. And now, my dear Valdimir, that we are alone, perhaps you will give me the long-promised explanation of your sudden flight from England," rather abruptly proposed Lord Beaudevere.

"I have no objection, if we have time. And afterwards, Beaue, will you tell me the secret of my own and my sister's early life?" demanded the young man.

"There was no secret, Valdimir, as I have often assured you!" exclaimed the baron, not, however, without the strong agitation that he always betrayed whenever this subject was introduced.

Young Desparde looked at his relative keenly for a moment, and then changed his phraseology without abandoning his point, by saying:

"Then, if not the *secret,* will you tell me the *story* of our

early life? For every life has a story, and therefore ours must have one; and, Beaue, it was my total ignorance of the story of my early life that left me a prey to a most designing villain, for he foisted upon me his own disgraceful history as mine. There were external circumstances to support the terrible falsehood and compel me to receive it as the truth. I did so, and fled the country to hide my dishonored head in the wilds of America. I fled without assigning any cause for my flight lest the disclosure of my shameful secret should blast the peace and ruin the prospects of my innocent sister."

While the young man spoke the strongest emotion shook his frame, but that seemed as nothing to the storm that whirled through the soul of Baron Beaudevere.

Thrice he attempted to speak before he could utter the words:

"Brandon Coyle—the mulatto! The son of a felon! He did this?"

Valdimir Desparde bowed his head in silence.

"I see it all! I see it all! This accursed villain! He made the stolen *alias* of his felon father the means of misleading you! Why? Oh, why did you not come to me immediately—to *me*, to contradict that infamous slander before taking your desperate flight? demanded the baron, with a frenzied gesture.

"Beaue, it was because you never would tell me the secret—that is, the story of our early life. Only that morning, Beaue, I had besought you to do so, and you had refused in such a manner as to silence my questions completely. Then came Coyle's revelation to me, supported by the strongest as well as the most fallacious circumstantial evidence. I thought that story was the truth, and that it explained the reason of your persistent silence. Beaue, if I had known the true story of our own early life—my sister's and mine—I could not have been deceived by a false one!" said Valdimir.

"Scoundrel! Idiot!" exclaimed the baron, bringing down his fist emphatically upon the cot.

But who was the scoundrel and who the idiot was not made quite clear by his words.

"At some more fitting time, Beaue, I will tell you the whole tale of this deception that drove me nearly mad and

send me an exile from my native land and from all that man holds dear in life; and also I will tell you the providential means through which I discovered the truth. It was a very singular chain of circumstances. But I presume, by what you have let fall, Beaue, that *you* at least knew this disgraceful story of Brandon Coyle always?"

"Yes," slowly replied the baron. "I knew it from the circumstances of the felon having stolen your father's money, jewels, letters of credit and name, and the complications that followed therefrom; but I do not believe that there was another man in the world, outside of the Coyle family, that *did* know it—that did know, I mean, anything whatever of that mulatto felon who was hanged in New Orleans, or of Mr. Brandon Coyle's close connection with him."

"But if this brother and sister are the children of that criminal then their name must be Sims, not Coyle," said Valdimir.

"It *is* Sims! But old Christopher Coyle, when he adopted these children of his unhappy niece, the widow of Sims, gave them his name. And I suppose that in his will he has taken care to make Brandon's inheritance of Caveland conditional upon his legal assumption of the name of Coyle."

"I suppose so; but now, Beaue, is there really any serious objection to your telling me the secret—I mean the story of our early years?" inquired Valdimir.

Again the face of the baron changed, and his voice faltered as he answered:

"I will tell you, but you—when you have heard all—you must not dare to blame——"

"For Heaven sake!" interrupted the young man, in alarm at the word blame," "tell me this at the outset—I have suffered so much, that I cannot bear suspense upon this subject—was there, then, any reproach, merited or *un*merited, attached to the name and memory of my father or my mother?"

"What in the deuce do you mean by such a question?" indignantly demanded the baron. "*'Reproach'* attached to your father or your mother? Of course not! not the shadow of the shade of reproach!"

"Thank heaven! And since there is no reproach I can-

not understand the reason of your great reluctance to speak of them," said Valdimir.

"That reluctance can be explained in three words."

Before Lord Beaudevere could utter another syllable the cell door was opened by the turnkey, who ushered in Mr. Reynolds Fox, the detective from Scotland Yard.

Lord Beaudevere had known and employed this officer before, and now he introduced him to Mr. Desparde.

No time was lost. The case was immediately set before him. He took it all down in shorthand cipher.

Then a consultation upon it ensued, and he took down notes and suggestions, also in shorthand cipher.

Just as he had concluded this preparatory work, and was about to take his leave, the cell door was again opened and the turnkey ushered in Mr. Stair.

The eminent lawyer entered, bowed and shook hands with the baron, and was by the latter introduced to the prisoner.

The lawyer also had his notebook, but it was in the hands of his clerk who waited in the corridor. The little cell was too limited in space to admit the presence of five men at the same time.

As soon, therefore, as Fox had bowed himself out of the cell, Mr. Stair called his clerk in.

And then the consultation began.

The clerk took down such notes as his chief suggested.

The conference lasted a long time.

The three gentlemen sat upon the side of the cot. The clerk stood before them, leaning his back against the wall and taking down the brief in shorthand on his tablets.

There was one circumstance that brought the greatest strength and comfort to the baron and his cousin—they saw that the counsel was perfectly convinced of Valdimir Desparde's innocence.

While they were still engaged there was a third arrival—Mr. Turner, who was duly admitted to the cell.

The last-named gentleman bowed to the party within, and then shook hands with his brother lawyer and with Lord Beaudevere, whom he had long known and by whom he was introduced to Mr. Desparde.

Room could scarcely he found for the newcomer.

The clerk was permitted to withdraw for a few minutes.

The baron now foresaw a recommencement of the whole case for the information of Mr. Turner and he knew that Mr. Stair and Valdimir Desparde were quite competent to the task. He was, besides, very anxious to get home earlier than he had first planned to do. He was troubled on account of Vivienne, lest she should have seen the account of Valdimir Desparde's arrest in the paper.

He therefore arose, and telling his cousin that he felt he was leaving him in good hands, he took his leave promising to return the next day.

He reached home about half past ten.

But he found no brilliantly-lighted drawing room or dining room—no sumptuously-spread supper table.

The porter met him in the hall.

"Is—where is Miss Desparde?" he inquired, as his heart sank with the heavy thought that she had learned the great misfortune that had befallen the family, and had been prostrated by it.

"Miss Desparde, my lord, is ill in bed, I am grieved to say, your lordship," solemnly replied the porter.

It was true, then! Vivienne had learned the news, and it had crushed her—killed her, perhaps.

Beaue shelled himself out of his ulster as swiftly as he could have turned a bean out of a pod, sprang upstairs three steps at a bound, and paused before Miss Desparde's door.

There he stopped, panted, and finally rapped softly.

The lady's maid opened the door.

*"How is she?"* breathed Beaue, in eager tones.

Before the girl could answer a word, a weak, hoarse nasal voice, half stifled by catarrh, but by no means laden with grief, inquired:

"Id thad hid lordshid! Led him come bin."

In rushed Beaue and up to the closely curtained bed, around which hung the mingled aromas of squills, paregoric, honey, borax, and what not!

"Did Valdimir come bid you?" inquired the invalid from her muffling flannels.

"No, my love, he has not recovered his property yet," answered the much relieved baron, who knew by her question that she had not yet learned the terrible truth.

"Whad a nuidance!" she said.

"I am sorry to see you so much indisposed, my dear," said he.

"Oh, Beaue, I hab god the worst gold in my head I ebber had in my lipe!"

"Yes, my dear, you must have taken it while standing out of the door last night with nothing around your head and shoulders," said the baron.

"Well, den, why don't you day 'I dold you do?" saucily inquired the invalid.

"Because that would be unkind, my dear, though I *did* tell you you would take cold."

"But I dibn't dake gold danding oud od doors, Beaue! I dook gold dedding in the drawing droom over the fire," retorted Vivienne, defiantly.

"There, my dear, don't try to talk longer! It must hurt you to do so—at least it is—excruciating to hear you!" said the baron.

Then turning to the maid he asked:

"Has she had advice?

"Yes, sir, I sent for doctor Bennet early this morning."

"Quite right. Where are the day's papers?"

"In the library, sir. No one has touched them."

Very much relieved in mind, Lord Beaudevere bade his young cousin good-night, wished her sound sleep and sweet dreams and went downstairs to his library.

There he found the newspapers, still unfolded.

He looked through them all carefully; but only in the telegraphic columns of the London papers did he see any notice of the yesterday's murder in the railway carriage, and that was without any allusion to his cousin, Valdimir Desparde.

The country papers were all weeklies, and would not be out until Saturday.

"There will be a full account of this tragedy in the papers to-morrow," he said to himself, "and I must take care that Vivienne does not see them. I am rather glad than otherwise that she *is* laid up with a cold, since it is not a dangerous one. The circumstance will enable me to keep this dreadful affair from her for some time yet. I must, however, call at Bennet's office to-morrow and warn him not

to speak of it to her," concluded the baron, as he rang the bell for the footmen to come and shut up the house, and then took his bedroom candle and went up to his chamber.

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## CHAPTER XX

### AT CASTLE MONTJOIE

The world has lost its bright illusions. One by one
The masks have gone; the lights burnt out;
The music dropped into silence, and she stands alone
In the dark halls, and hears no sound of life
Save the monotonous beating of her heart.

LONGFELLOW.

Now she will sit all day, and now she's fain
To rise and walk, then sigh and sit again;
Then try some work, forget it and think on,
Wishing, with perfect love, that time were gone.

LEIGH HUNT.

PERFECT peace fell on Montjoie Castle after the exodus of the Coyles.

The good old earl was gone indeed, but his granddaughter was comforted for his departure by the thought that he had gone to join the beloved wife with whom he had lived in harmony and happiness for more than sixty years on earth.

In her tender memory of them there was no bitterness of sorrow.

Lord Beaudevere and Vivienne Desparde had remained with her at Castle Montjoie until the arrival of Net Fleming.

Net came on the Saturday afternoon and brought the children, according to her promise.

These little ones were wild with delight, in anticipation of the long carriage ride and the long visit at the end of it.

From the moment in which Net announced these prospective pleasures to them, which she did on the afternoon of her return from the old earl's funeral, the children had

made Little Mammam's life a burden to her with questions as to—

"*When* are we going?"

"How many days before Saturday comes?"

"How many nights?"

"How many hours?"

And when Saturday *did* come, with a drizzling rain, the children arose in despair, until Net assured them that if the carriage should come they should go, whether it rained or cleared.

And then they begged to be dressed for the journey immediately after dinner, and when their request was complied with they stood at the windows and flattened their noses against the panes, watching for the approach of the carriage.

About two o'clock in the afternoon their vigilance was rewarded. The rain ceased, the sun shone out, the clouds dispersed, and—a light, covered cart drove up to the cottage gate.

The children thought *that* was the carriage which had come for them, and they raised a shout of joy as they rushed out of the parlor and tore open the front door.

But only a groom from Castle Montjoie dismounted from the seat and came through the gate and up the little walk and put a note into the hand of Mrs. Fleming.

It was from the young countess and contained but a few words, saying:

"DEAREST NET: I send the light cart for yours and the children's luggage, that you may not be encumbered with it in the carriage, which will follow in a few minutes.

"It will be the close brougham, in which you may venture to come without fear of taking cold, even though it should continue to rain. Lord Beaudevere and Vivienne are only waiting for your arrival to take leave of me and return to Cloudland.

"It is good of my guardian to give me my own will in regard to my remaining at the castle; but he says he means to use his power only to guard, not to control.

"Come along, Net! I am anxiously awaiting you,

ARIELLE."

"Can I help to take the luggage out, ma'am?" inquired the groom, touching his hat.

"I thank you, yes; I will call some one to show you where it is," answered the little lady, who then summoned Peter Ken from the kitchen and told him to assist the groom in removing the two trunks that were already packed and waiting in the bedroom.

By the time the luggage had been placed upon the cart, and the cart had been driven away, the brougham drew up at the gate.

Net had locked up all the inside of the house, and had sent her maid-of-all-work home. Now, therefore, she left her faithful Peter Ken to put out the last fires, lock up the house, and take the key home with himself.

As Net left the house door and overtook the two children at the gate, she saw, to her slight dismay, that Luke had the cat hugged up in his arms to be the companion of his visit, and Ella had the two little straw hearth brooms to take with her.

It cost Little Mammam some trouble to convince the children as to the propriety of leaving puss and the besoms at home.

They yielded at length only on condition that Peter Ken should promise to feed the cat every day, and take care of the brooms until their return home.

Then at length they gladly submitted to be lifted into the brougham, whither Net immediately followed them.

In a few more minutes, to their great delight, they were bowling rapidly down the lane towards the turnpike road.

It was a happy journey to the children, who keenly enjoyed every mile of the ride, and Net sympathetically entered into their enjoyment.

Three hours of this, to them, delightful drive, brought them to Castle Montjoie.

The little ones had never in their lives seen anything like so lofty and imposing a structure as Castle Montjoie.

On their near approach they grew full of wonder, and plied Little Mammam with a multitude of questions.

"Was it not biggerer than the Ogre's castle in Puss-in-Boots?"

"Wasn't it a great deal biggerer than the giant's castle in Jack and the Beanstalk?"

"Anyway, it was ten times biggerer than their church, which was the biggerest house they had ever seen," etc., etc., etc.

When they passed up the winding road cut in the solid rock and leading up to the castle gates, the children stopped talking and held their tongues, and almost their very breath in fear.

But when they reached the summit of the rock, and passed over the drawbridge across the old moat, and through the archway in the wall, over which hung the long disused portcullis, their eyes and mouths were both opened with wonder and curiosity.

The carriage crossed the court yard to the modernized buildings on the opposite side, at the central hall door of which it drew up.

A groom came to the horses' heads.

A footman opened the door and lifted out little Ella, who, taking the liveried servant for a gentleman, said, very humbly and politely:

"Thank you, sir," as soon as he had set her down.

Luke followed.

Net alighted last of all, and taking the hands of the two children led them up the stone steps to the great oaken doors that were opened for their admission.

Arielle received them in the hall, embraced Net in silent welcome, and then exclaimed:

"I was so much afraid the rain would prevent you from coming!"

"Oh, but wese was coming if it poured and *poured,* wese was," cried Luke.

"If it poured and *poured,*" added Ella.

"Were you? You dear children! That was right!" exclaimed Arielle, giving each one a hand, and then adding: "I hope you are going to be very happy here."

"But Mammam wuzzent let us bring Pudence wiz us," complained Luke.

"No, wuzzent let us bring Pudence nor ze b'ooms, neezer," added Ella.

"What do they mean?" inquired their puzzled young hostess, appealing to their mammam.

"Oh, they wanted to bring the cat and their brooms," laughed Net.

"Well, why didn't you let them? Do you want your cat?" sympathetically inuqired the young lady, as she led them upstairs, followed by Net.

"Es; tauze poor Pudence will be lonesome zere by her-se'f," said Luke.

"Zere by her se'f," echoed Ella.

"It was tuel to leaze Pudence all alone," added Luke.

"All alone," echoed Ella.

"Your little mammam wouldn't do anything cruel. She thought I wouldn't like to have 'Pudence,' and so she didn't bring her. But I will send a groom on horseback to bring her this very afternoon, so you can have her, maybe, before you go to bed, or at any rate the first minute you are awake to-morrow morning."

"Oh, that will be joyful!" exclaimed Luke.

"Joyful!" echoed Ella.

"*Would* you take so much unnecessary trouble?" inquired Net.

"*Now,* my dear, for *you* to ask such a question! It is not unnecessary. How much the missing of one little inexpensive trifle spoils all the enjoyment that wealth and skill can supply! 'Pudence,' you perceive, is necessary to the perfection of these children's enjoyment. And then again, you see, my men servants have next to nothing to do. Let one of them go to Miston and bring 'Pudence.' And how about the brooms, my darlings?" she inquired, turning again to the children.

"Oh, we don't tare so much about zem. B'ooms won't be lonesome," said Luke.

"No, 'b'ooms won't be lonesome,'" echoed Ella.

They had now reached a landing on an extensive upper hall, from which doors opened into bed chambers and dressing rooms on every hand.

Arielle, preceding her guest, led the children into a lofty and spacious sitting room, the first of a handsome and extensive suit that she had appropriated to the use of Net and the twins.

A neat and trim little country girl belonging to the estate was in attendance.

She was in mourning for her late master, and wore a black bombazine dress, white lawn bib apron, collar and cuffs, and a white net cap trimmed with black ribbon.

"This is your maid, my dear. Her name is Nelly Lacy, and she is a younger sister of my attendant, Lacy," said Lady Arielle.

The rosy-cheeked girl blushed and courtesied and courtesied and blushed, until Net said:

"I am sure I shall like you, Nelly. You look very much like your sister. Will you take off the children's wraps?"

Nelly courtesied again and drew off little Luke's overcoat and gum shoes, for which service the little fellow, mistaking the smart waiting maid in a bombazine dress and a mob cap for a young widow, as he had mistaken the smart footman for a young officer, bowed and said:

"I sanks you vezy much, ma'am."

And little Ella, when the same service was performed for her, made her acknowledgments in the same language.

"You see, my rustic children are not accustomed to such grandeur," whispered Net, with a smile. "All their notions of female domestics are drawn from women with coarse gowns tucked up to their waists and sleeves rolled up above their elbows, bare headed, bare armed, and often by preference, bare footed, too! like poor Kit Ken! Ah, poor Kit! Where is she now?" And Net's laughing whisper ended in a sigh.

"If we ever get trace of her we will take care of her, Net," said Lady Arielle.

"Yes, if we ever get trace of her. And I think we shall, sooner or later. As far as I have observed among our unfortunate village girls, their career is soon run, and they always creep home, like wounded animals, to die! Kit is the third girl who has disappeared from Miston during my recollection. The first one returned to die in the almshouse. The second was found dead on her father's doorstep one bitter winter night," sighed Net.

"But we must try to prevent that in Kit's case. We must try to find her in time! She has been a victim, not a sinner, poor soul——"

"Unless overweening pride and vanity be sins, which we are taught to believe that they are! Poor Kit fell, not through love, but through her passionate desire to become a 'leddy.'"

The little maid had, meantime, taken the children into

the adjoining nursery to brush their hair, so that this short colloquy was carried on quietly between the two friends.

"You must let the little ones come down to dessert after dinner," said Lady Arielle, as she stood by Net, who was taking off her bonnet and gloves before the glass.

"They will be delighted," replied Little Mammam.

"And now—oh! I had nearly forgotten through our talk about poor Kit—I must see about sending for the children's cat," said Lady Arielle, stepping to the bell and ringing it vigorously.

Adams, the lady's footman, answered the summons.

Lady Arielle's instructions were concise.

"Go down to the stables and tell one of the young grooms to mount a fresh horse and ride to Miston to the house of James Ken, the fisherman, and ask——" Here Lady Arielle hesitated and looked at Net.

"Peter," said the latter.

"Ask Peter Ken to go with him to Bird's Nest Cottage in Church Lane and catch the children's cat, and put it in a bag and give it to him. And then he must bring it on here safely. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, my lady, perfectly."

"Tell the groom to get back as soon as possible."

"Yes, my lady."

"And not to come without the cat."

"No, my lady."

"Now hurry away."

"Yes, my lady."

And the man bowed and was gone.

"Mammam! *Mammam!* MAMMAM!" called the children from the adjoining nursery.

Net, with her black hair in one hand and her brush in the other, went to the nursery door, where a pretty picture greeted her sight:

The children at their tea!

It was a low table, covered with a white cloth, and decorated with a Liliputian service of rosebud china, and laden with a dainty repast of light cakes and biscuits, fruit and milk.

The two little ones were seated opposite each other on little low chairs, and Nelly Lacy was waiting on them.

"Oh, that is very pretty!" exclaimed Net.

"It is luzly," said Luke.

"Luzly," echoed Ella.

Net expressed her warm approval, and then went back to her bedroom to do up her hair.

When her toilet was completed the two young ladies left the children in the care of Nelly Lacy, with orders that they should be brought down to dessert when the time should come, and then descended to the drawing room, where they found Lord Beaudevere and Vivienne waiting for them.

The baron advanced and received Net with his usual courtly grace, and Vivienne kissed her with much affection.

Dinner was soon afterwards announced, and the baron gave his arm to Net to take her in.

"There is a famine of gentlemen in this house just at present, Vivienne. Will you take *my* arm in lack of a better?" said the young countess, as she drew her friend's hand under her elbow.

The four sat down to an exquisite dinner, which the baron, being an epicure, appreciated and enjoyed.

"You will do well to retain the services of your present *chef,* my dear," he said, as he tested the merits of a new soup.

"I shall retain *every one* of my dear grandfather's old servants," replied the little countess.

"Oh! I do not recommend *that!* What, for instance, could you do with his lordship's valet?" inquired the baron.

"Make him groom of the chambers—an office which our family have not hitherto established in our homes, but which I will set up for his benefit," smiled Arielle.

"Oh!" said the baron; and he swallowed the rest of his soup in silence.

The remaining courses were also highly approved of by the baron, who, in pushing his last plate away, gave expression to the following opinion:

"I think that the great longevity of the late earl and countess was, under Divine Providence, due to their own practical wisdom in employing the highest culinary talent without regard to cost to prepare their food. It is what a human being eats and drinks that largely goes to save or to destroy his or her life."

"I will keep Monsieur Delatour, my lord, unless you would like to take him off my hands," replied Arielle.

"Humph! It is a temptation, but I won't deprive you of him, Countess."

The cloth was now withdrawn and the fruit, cake, wine and nuts were placed upon the table.

With these appeared Net's two children in the charge of Nelly Lacy, followed by two high chairs brought by a footman from the lumber room in one of the towers, by the direction of Lady Arielle.

The high chairs were put up on each side of the hostess and the children set in them.

At first they were very shy, but as there were but three ladies and one gentleman at the table, and these were very kind to them, they soon recovered their spirits.

Beaue peeled oranges and picked out the kernels of walnuts for them, and the footman in waiting brought cake.

And to the peer of the realm and to the serving man equally the children responded for every attention:

"Sanky, sir! Sanky, sir!"

They knew no better. Net was wondering if it were worth while to teach them any better.

After dinner the party adjourned to the drawing room and the children were taken upstairs by Nelly Lacy, followed by Net, who excused herself to her friends by saying that it had always been her habit to see the little ones to bed.

Indeed, of course, it was always Net who heard the children say their prayers at night.

Luke and Ella were very tired, however, on this occasion, and did not as usual detain their Little Mammam to sing hymns or tell Bible stories long after they had laid their little heads upon their pillows.

In fact, they were both asleep before they were well laid down, and Net was at liberty to return to her friends in the parlor, where she found Lady Arielle seated at the piano and Lord Beaudevere and Vivienne standing behind her.

They were singing to her accompaniment an evening hymn, with the music from Haydn.

Net glided up to the group and added her fine soprano voice to them, completing the quartet.

They spent a long evening with sacred music, and then separated and retired.

The first creatures awake in that castle the next morning were Net's babies. And their first waking thought after they had recovered from their astonishment at finding themselves in a strange bed, and had recollected how they came there, was—the cat.

She was coiled up comfortably asleep on the foot of their bed, where she had been placed by the faithful Nelly, who had received her late at night from the hands of Moses, the groom, who had brought her from the Birds' Nest Cottage.

The children now wanted nothing to complete their happiness. They had the freedom of the castle and the court yard, and in the care of Nelly Lacy they wandered about at will, all over the place, surprised and delighted anew at every novelty, and pleased with their pretty young nursemaid, whose position as a servant they began to understand, and whom they warned that they hoped she would not "wun away as poor Tit did."

After luncheon that day Lord Beaudevere and Miss Desparde took leave of their friends and went home to Cloudland.

## CHAPTER XXI

### DREAM OR VISION?

Oh, spirit land! thou land of dreams!
A world thou art of mysterious gleams,
Of startling voices and sounds of strife—
A world of the lost who have entered life!

FELICIA HEMANS.

She warned in dreams, her murder she did tell
From point to point, as really it befell. DRYDEN.

The vision fled and vanished from her sight;
The dreamer wakened in a mortal fright.

IBID.

NET and Arielle were left with only each other and the two children for company; and if they could not be called absolutely happy they were at least very peaceful and contented.

On the third day of her sojourn at the castle Net received a short note from Antoinette Deloraine, saying that she was no longer able to ride or walk out, and scarcely able to sit at her writing table long enough to write that note, and imploring Net to come to her, even if she had to bring the children with her.

If Net then could have divided herself between Arielle and Antoinette, she would have done so.

She could not bear to refuse Antoinette, and she could not bear to leave Arielle at this juncture.

She wrote a most affectionate note to her cousin, telling her of the state of affairs at Castle Montjoie, and promising her that she would set out for Deloraine Park immediately after Christmas.

In fact, Net was secretly looking forward to the return of Valdimir Desparde, and his full reconciliation with Lady Arielle.

Such a happy consummation for the young lovers would set her so much at ease on her young friend's account that she would feel quite free to leave her.

Once she tried to sound Arielle upon the subject.

"We have not heard anything from Cloudland since Lord Beaudevere and Vivienne left us. But I suppose we shall hear from them as soon as Mr. Desparde arrives," she said.

"I do not know why they should announce his arrival to us," replied Lady Arielle, coldly, though with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Because he is coming to vindicate himself, my dear," replied Net, gently, "and, indeed, he needs to vindicate himself to *you* more than any one else alive."

"I do not wish to hear his vindication. We already know what it will amount to. He fell into low company; he was entrapped into marrying a low girl; his wife and child have perished by yellow fever in New Orleans; he devoted himself to the care of the sufferers until the reign of the plague was over; and now he comes back a free man to vindicate his character. What sort of a vindication is this! I want none of it!"

"Oh, my dear Arielle! remember how he loved you, notwithstanding all, and try to forgive him," pleaded Net.

"I *do* forgive him! I *must* forgive him, or never expect to be forgiven myself! But I cannot—cannot receive him on the old conditions again! I could pass over almost any other fault in a man but this one that he has committed! He allowed himself to be drawn away from me by another woman! I cannot condone that offense—no I cannot! I cannot! It has opened a great gulf between our souls, wider than that which separated Dives from Lazarus!" said Arielle, passionately, while her delicate frame shook under the storm of emotion aroused by the theme.

"I do believe that you could more easily forgive your lover for murdering another man than for loving another woman!" exclaimed Net.

"I—do—believe—I—could," answered Arielle.

"Perhaps he never did either love or marry another woman. We have not *his* word for it that he did. We have only the detective's report; and they fall upon false clews with masterly ingenuity. Mr. Desparde says nothing about this—that he is coming home to vindicate himself from all reproach. We should at least give him the opportunity, and not prejudge him," persisted Net.

"Say no more! I cannot bear the subject, Net; but

tell me, dear girl, do you often hear from Mr. Fleming?" inquired Lady Arielle, not maliciously at all—because she had not the slightest suspicion that Adrian Fleming had deserted his wife—but only to change the subject.

Net flushed to her temples, and answered evasively:

"Not for a month. When I heard last, he was in America, and was about to start for the wilds of the West to hunt the buffalo."

Net did not add, that even for this information she was indebted to the "Personal" column of a Devonshire paper that had accidentally fallen into her hands.

How Net loathed the part she had to play to shield her recreant husband from reproach! Had it been only herself who was to suffer, she would have told the whole story of her hapless marriage, rather than have appeared in false colors and lived a lie!

Arielle perceived that this subject pained her friend as much as the other one had pained herself, and she therefore refrained from pursuing it; thinking, perhaps, that Net felt the continued absence of her husband as a humiliating neglect of herself, and thinking no worse than that.

"Well, never mind! Let us leave off talking of the men! The theme is a most unprofitable one! Let us talk of women! What *is* the matter with Antoinette Deloraine?" she inquired with much interest.

"A hereditary delicacy of constitution that shortened the lives of her foremothers for many generations past. Each one has died younger than the mother who bore her, and poor Antoinette, who thinks that *she* is dying, is several years younger than her own mother was when she passed away. I am very sorry for Antoinette. Her position is truly pitiable, her fate almost tragical. Think of it! Not yet nineteen years old—youthful, beautiful, wealthy, accomplished, and ambitious. *So* ambitious! She declared she would not marry any one under the rank of a duke, you know. And now to be dying, alone in that remote country house, with no one near her but nurses and servants! It is too sorrowful. I must go to her immediately after Christmas," said Net.

Lady Arielle would have expostulated, but she felt that, however unwilling she might feel to part with Net, she

could not conscientiously object to have her go to her dying cousin.

"Why—in case of Antoinette Deloraine's dying unmarried—*you* are the heiress of Deloraine Park, are you not?" suddenly inquired Lady Arielle, as if the thought had just occurred to her.

"Yes, but don't let us discuss that, please; the thought is really and truly too distressing to me," sighed Net, turning away her head.

"Too distressing to you, is it, my unselfish darling, to remember that you are the heiress of Deloraine Park? It will not be too distressing to Sir Adrian and Lady Fleming, take my word for it! But there, I will say no more about it. I suppose you must go to Antoinette after Christmas."

"Or earlier, if she should get worse. I wrote and told her that."

A few days after this conversation Arielle received a note from her guardian, telling her that the *Colorado* steamship, from New York to Southampton, had arrived, bringing Mr. Valdimir Desparde, who had that morning telegraphed to his uncle to send a dog cart to meet him at the Miston Station at seven o'clock the next morning. The note ended in these words:

"But I shall not send anybody, my dear. I shall go myself to meet my boy. And if he can vindicate himself to my satisfaction, as I hope and believe that he can, I will bring him to your feet without delay. If he cannot—and it may be possible that he cannot—I will not permit him to approach you."

Arielle read this note to Net, and then asked her:

"What do you think of it?"

"I think, as the baron does, that Mr. Desparde will be able to vindicate himself fully. And in that case he will soon be at your feet, dearest," confidently replied Net.

Arielle's delicate face flushed to the edges of her hair.

"I hope they will make no mistake about what I shall consider a full vindication. If he had deserted me for another woman *no* excuse that he could make would vindicate him in my eyes. I could never, never condone that

offense. I *might* forgive it—nay, I *must* forgive it—but I can never, never condone it!" she exclaimed.

"Hush, my darling. Do not excite yourself prematurely. I do not believe one word about that other woman. But, thank Heaven, your suspense, this trying suspense, will soon be over."

"Yes. Valdimir starts from Southampton this morning, and by traveling day and night will reach Miston Station to-morrow at seven in the morning. The baron will meet him there, hear his explanation as they drive home to Cloudland, and if that explanation shall satisfy him, he will bring the wanderer here in the afternoon. *To-morrow afternoon!* Oh, how near! Ah! I *hope*, I *pray* that there has been no other woman in the case! But, ah! what is the use of such a hope or prayer in regard to a past event, which is fixed past hoping for or praying for!"

All the rest of that day Net noticed that Lady Arielle was very restless and could settle herself to no occupation.

At night, on leaving her friend to retire, she said:

"I am going to bed, Net, because I do not know what else to do, as it is bed time, but I know I shall not sleep. Oh, Net! is it not humiliating to feel this interest in a man who offered me the greatest affront a woman could possibly receive?" exclaimed Lady Arielle, in a flame of self-scorn.

"Or who seemed to have offered you this affront. Appearances are deceitful. You must wait for his explanation," replied Net.

"I shall lie awake and think of him—think of him on the railway train speeding northward through the darkness of the night. He will be traveling all night! he will be at Miston at seven o'clock to-morrow morning; he will be at Cloudland at half past nine, and—if all should be right in his explanation to Lord Beaudevere—they will be *here* by twelve! Oh, Net, what a thought! What is the hour, now, dear Net? I never carry a watch; look at yours."

"It wants about two minutes of ten," answered her friend, after consulting the little timepiece that hung at her girdle.

"Fourteen hours yet to wait! Oh! if I could only sleep seven of them away! I might bear the rest! Ah! it is degrading to care so much about this man! But it is only

in the hope that the report of the detectives may have been a false one. If it was true, I will never condone the offense! Never!"

So, with her soul torn between love and wrath, Lady Arielle retired.

Net went to her own apartments, stole on tiptoe into the nursery to look at the sleeping children and assure herself that they were safe and well, and then she offered up her private devotions and went to bed.

Net also lay long awake, thinking of her friend, hoping and praying that Valdimir Desparde's explanation of his most extraordinary and apparently most unpardonable conduct might prove satisfactory to Lady Arielle, and that a full reconciliation and reunion might make the lovers happy.

The little clock on the mantel had struck twelve before Net fell asleep.

Then she slept soundly for several hours, and dreamed a painful but confused dream about Kit, of which she could make nothing at all coherent.

She was aroused from her sleep at last by a hurried rapping at her chamber door.

She started up, only half awake, exclaiming confusedly:

"Well? Yes! Who is it? What is the matter?"

"It is I, Net! Open the door, dear!" answered the trembling voice of Lady Arielle.

Net, much surprised, sprang out of bed and opened the door in a second.

Pale as marble, in the early winter morning light, cold and shivering, Lady Arielle stood there in her white night-dress.

"My Dear!" What is the matter?" exclaimed Net, in consternation.

"Let me get into bed with you, Net! I—I—I've seen—I've seen——" began the girl, but her voice died away in her shaking frame and chattering teeth.

Net hurriedly turned down the warm bed clothes and led her shuddering friend up to it.

Arielle threw herself in and drew the covering up over her head and lay shaking as with a hard ague.

Net hastily drew on her warm dressing gown and slip-

pers, and then bent over the shuddering form that had taken possession of her bed.

"Arielle, dearest, what is it? A chill or a fright? Shall I call up the housekeeper?"

"Oh, no, no, no! It is not a chill! Call no one. Get into bed again! It is not near time to rise! You'll take cold!" muttered the girl, in smothered tones, as she shivered and shook under the cover.

"But, Arielle, you need assistance. Let me——"

"No, no! It is the shock! The fright! Come to bed! I'll tell you."

Net went and locked the chamber door and then got into bed and lay down beside the shaking girl, who at once clasped her closely like a frightened child.

"Now, when you are sufficiently composed, you will tell me what has alarmed you," said Net, in a soothing tone.

But Arielle continued to shiver and cling to her friend in silence for a few moments longer; then she said:

"Oh, Net! You remember, after grandmamma left us I told you that I saw her sitting in her chair in my room?"

"Yes, dear, I remember you told me so," replied the little woman, forbearing, however, to utter her thought that it was only a delusion of the imagination.

"Well, Net, I was not afraid of *her!* no, nor of grandpapa either, for I saw *him* also, Net, though I never told you so. I would not tell you because I thought you would only smile at me, as you did when I told you of my seeing grandmamma."

"My dear, I thought you were the subject of some hallucination of your senses, the result of your weakened nervous system," answered Net, gently.

"I know you did. And indeed my weakness made me more susceptible to impressions from the spirit world; but Net, they were real impressions. I *did* see my grandmother sitting in her own arm chair in my room, within a week after her departure, and I did see my grandfather sitting at his study table when I opened the door one day."

"Did you address either of them?"

"No, for though I was not afraid of them, I was startled by their apparitions, and then they disappeared."

"But you have not seen either of them lately?"

"No, it was shortly after grandmamma departed that

I saw her several times; but never after the first few weeks. I have seen grandpapa but once."

"Then it was not the apparition of either of these that frightened you?" ventured Net.

"Oh, no! oh, no! I should not have been afraid of them! *They* looked *so* natural! *But this one—Oh-h-h!*" shuddered Arielle, clinging to Net.

"Tell me all about it and you will feel better. I dare say it was a nightmare dream," said Net, reassuringly.

"A dream! How could it have been a dream, when I never slept for one instant? And as for the nightmare, I never had it in my life."

"What was it, then, my darling?"

"I am going to tell you! I have not been asleep to-night. I did not even doze. I was so wide awake. The room was so dark that towards morning, when the smoulderirg fire on the hearth went entirely out, I could see the first faint approach of day between the folds of the curtains and the slats of the shutters. I was watching that faint, increasing light, and saying to myself that—*he*—Valdimir—had just about reached Miston Junction, and while I was so watching, I heard the clock strike seven. Then feeling very tired, I closed my eyes and——"

"Fell asleep," added Net.

"No, I did not! I fell into a quiet, conscious, restful state that seemed better than sleep. I lay enjoying this benign repose for some moments—I know not how long—when—oh, Net!" suddenly exclaimed the young lady, covering her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some terrific vision that memory had conjured up visibly before them.

"Go on, my dear," said her companion, in a low voice.

"Oh, Net! With my eyes closed, with every sense closed in perfect rest, as I lay there I became aware—in some mysterious, occult manner, which was not through sight or hearing, or any material faculty—I say I became aware of *some presence at my bedside.* This awed me into a deeper quietude. Soon I seemed to hear, not through my bodily ears, but through my spirit—*deep breathing over me.* It laid me under a deathlike spell. Soon, out of this breathing issued sighs, softer than the softest notes of the Eolian harp, bearing these words: *'See me. He*

*slew me for sending the letter that saved you!'* Then—oh, shall I ever get over it!—then, out of the deep darkness loomed upon my sealed sight the shadowy form of a tall woman, clothed in long, black raiments. Spellbound with awe, I could not move, or speak, or breathe, while the shadowy, black-robed form grew out into more distinct outlines—a clear-cut, marble-white face, with fire-bright, azure eyes, and a long, cloudy veil of pallid, golden-hued hair. I had no power to draw my gaze, my mental sight, from that marble-white face, those fire-bright eyes, until I recognized Kit Ken! Then I screamed, and the vision vanished!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### MYSTERIES

Dread is the power of dreams! Who has not felt,
When in the morning light such visions melt,
How the veiled soul, though struggling to be free,
Ruled by that deep, unfathomed mystery,
Wakes, haunted by the thoughts of good or ill
Whose shading influence pursues us still!

CAROLINE NORTON.

As ARIELLE finished her strange recital, she clung to her friend and shook again as with an ague fit.

Net was much amazed, not so much by the vision itself, which she explained mentally upon natural grounds, as by the effect it had had on Arielle.

"Well, my dear, what happened next?" she inquired, thinking it best to encourage the terrified girl to talk and get the whole subject off her mind.

"Oh, then, Net, as soon as the awful vision vanished, I recovered my powers of motion; I started up, sprang out of bed and ran to you. That is all. I feel better now since I have told you. Oh, Net, what do you think of it?" piteously inquired the trembling girl.

Net Fleming did not answer for some moments, but then she said, deprecatingly:

"Don't you see, my dear, that this was only a dream?

While you were lying there so quietly, so restfully, as you describe yourself to have been, you unconsciously dropped asleep, though perhaps only for a moment, and dreamed all this."

"No, no, no, I did not, Net! Oh, Net! how very, *very* hard you are to convince. But perhaps you have never in your life seen a supernatural form or heard a supernatural voice?"

"No," replied the sound-bodied and sound-minded little woman, "I never have."

"Well, then, of course, it is of no use talking to you! I might as well talk of light to a person born stone blind, or of music to one born stone deaf! I don't blame you for your incredulity, Net."

"No, nor do I blame you for your illusions, dear," smiled Net.

The mantel clock struck eight.

Net slipped out of bed and unlocked the chamber door and rang her bell, and then returned to bed, for the room was very cold.

Nelly Lacy came in and made the fire.

And the next minute the two children burst open the nursery door and ran in, in their night gowns, and climbed up into Little Mammam's bed, all unconscious that she had a companion.

"They are enough to put all the ghosts of Gehenna to flight; are they not?" laughed Net, as she returned their caresses.

*"Hush, oh, hush!"* breathed Arielle in an awestruck tone.

When the fire had warmed the room the friends arose.

Lady Arielle went back to her own chamber, where she found another bright fire and her maid Lucy Lacy in attendance.

Nelly Lacy took the children back to the nursery and dressed them.

Net made her simple toilet, and went downstairs to the breakfast parlor. She was soon joined by her hostess, who, on entering, said:

"As we are alone, I have sent Lacy to tell Nelly to bring the children to breakfast with us. I know that they have been accustomed to breakfast with you. I forgot to do it

earlier, and only thought of it when they came bursting in upon us upstairs."

"How kind and thoughtful you are, dear Arielle."

"I *mean* to be kind, but indeed I am not thoughtful. If I *had* been I should have had these children at table with us ever since Lord Beaudevere and Vivienne went away. Ah, no! But here are the children."

They all sat down at the table, and lingered over the breakfast until the clock struck ten.

"Only two hours now, dear Net. Surely—surely—if all is right, they will be here in two hours!" exclaimed Lady Arielle, as she put her hand through Net's bended elbow and leaned thereon, walking up and down the hall—for Arielle was too restless to sit down.

But they had not to wait until noon for news.

At half past eleven, while the two friends were sitting in the smaller drawing room in tasteful morning dresses, waiting with almost breathless impatience for the arrival of the expected visitors, Adams, the ladies' footman, entered with a note on a silver salver, which he handed to the young lady, saying:

"A groom from Cloudland brought it, my lady."

"Well, take him to the servants' hall and give him some refreshments while his horse rests," said Lady Arielle, scarcely able to curb her impatience until the man left the room.

Then, with beating heart and burning cheeks, she tore open the note, which she saw was in Vivienne's handwriting, and she read it, while Net watched her anxiously.

Vivienne's little missive was as follows:

"CLOUDLAND, Dec. 16th, 18—.

"MY DEAREST ARIELLE: I write to save you some hours of useless anxiety. My brother arrived at Miston Station in good health early this morning, and was met by Beaue.

"But, alack-a-day! as the old folks used to say, he was subpœnaed as a witness upon some disturbance that occurred on the train, and had to go back to some station to testify.

"Beaue went with him, and sent the carriage back, with a note for me by the coachman to tell me of this annoying *contretemps,* and to say that I must not expect them back

until late to-night. Did you ever hear of anything more provoking in your life? I have no words strong enough to express my disgust and abhorrence of this state of affairs.

"I shall sit up for them to-night, and send them both up to see you early to-morrow morning. And in the meantime, with love to Net and the children, I am your own

"VIVIENNE."

Arielle read this over to herself, and then read it aloud to Net.

"Now, *is not* this the most vexatious thing that could possibly happen? It really makes me feel ill. I can appreciate now the old proverb that says: 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' My heart is sick. Twenty-four hours more! Oh, dear Net! Couldn't you chloroform me, and keep me under the influence of that pain-killing drug until this time to-morrow morning?" she inquired, with a piteous look in the face of her friend.

"It is very trying, I know, dear Arielle; but you must be brave and patient. It will not seem so long. The day is already half spent, the night you will sleep away, because you did not sleep last night, and to-morrow morning you will have nothing to do but to expect your visitors," said Net, hopefully.

Arielle sighed deeply, thinking within her own mind that if she could feel certain Valdimir Desparde had *not* been so false to her as to have married another woman, and if it would not be so unmaidenly, she could find it in her heart to take Net and go to Cloudland to share the vigil of Vivienne, and so meet Valdimir half a day sooner.

She controlled this passionate desire so completely that Net did not even suspect its existence.

But the day passed very heavily with Arielle, who could settle herself to nothing.

When bed time came Arielle said to her friend:

"Net, dear, I am really afraid to sleep alone. I wish you would let me share your room this one night. Should I disturb you, do you think?"

"Why, no, dear! I am usually a very good sleeper, not easily disturbed. How should I be when I have been accustomed for the last four years to sleep between two kicking children? I shall be glad of your company."

So that night the two girls slept together, and slept soundly until morning.

They arose blithely too, and soon after breakfast they began to look for their longed-for visitors.

But another disappointment awaited them.

Again Adams appeared with a little, cream-colored note on a silver salver.

Arielle grew dizzy as she took it and tore it open.

It contained only a few informal lines, as follows:

"Beaue is a fox, an old fox, a sly old fox! He did not inform me yesterday morning of the nature of the disturbance that detained Valdimir. And last night he came home without my brother. And when I brought him to bay he had to confess that Valdimir was personally interested in that 'disturbance'; that in point of fact, said 'disturbance' was caused by my brother's having been robbed while in the railway carriage, of the most valuable family jewel in his possession! a jewel worth all the landed property in the family. I suppose it is the great historical diamond called 'Sirius.' *I* thought that jewel was safe in the vaults of my cousin's banker. How careless of Valdimir to carry it about him.

"I will tell you this: if ever it should come into *my* possession—which is scarcely possible—I should sell it to some sovereign with more cash than common sense, and invest the price in solid real estate with a sure title that could neither be lost nor stolen.

"Well, Valdimir has gone back ever so far on his track in search of his stolen jewel, and will not return until he has recovered it.

"Beaue says that there is no doubt it will be recovered. A jewel of such worth cannot long be lost.

"Beaue only came home to relieve my anxiety, and went back this morning to rejoin Valdimir and assist in the search.

"I am laid up with a dreadful cold in the head, caught through standing out in the night air watching for Valdimir.

"Take warning by my fate and don't watch.

"Love to Net and babies. Your own

"VIVIENNE."

Arielle read the letter and passed it over to Net, without a word of comment, but with a look of comic despair, if such a term be allowable.

She was very far from suspecting the gravity of the matter that detained her lover.

Net in turn read the letter, and passed it back to its owner, only saying:

"It is the fate of Tantalus."

The footman who had brought in the letter stood waiting orders.

"Go, Adams, and bring me the morning's papers. If that robbery took place night before last, there must be some notice of it in this morning's *Times*."

"Beg pardon, my lady, but no papers have come this morning," replied the man.

"Why, how is that? It is one o'clock! They should have been here before now."

"They have not come, my lady."

"Well, go; and as soon as they do come bring them to me. Yet stay! I must write a line of acknowledgment to Miss Desparde. I did not reply to her note yesterday," added Arielle, in an aside to Net.

She sat down to a writing table near the fireplace and scribbled off a hasty note, very guarded, however, in its wording, not by any means exposing the extremity of her own anxiety and impatience, but only expressing her own and Net Fleming's sympathy with Vivienne's disappointment and indisposition, and their hopes of her brother's speedy arrival and her own happy recovery.

She read this letter also to Net and then sealed, directed and dispatched it by Adams to Miss Desparde's waiting messenger.

All that day Lady Arielle waited and watched for the daily newspapers that failed to come.

She did not know that her guardian had caused them to be stopped, lest they should shock her with the news of Valdimir Desparde's arrest on the dreadful charge of murder.

She blamed the unlucky news agent, and denounced him in no measured terms.

"Jobson has a monopoly at Miston! He is too independent! He neglects his business! There should be a rival establishment there, which I should certainly pat-

ronize! The *idea* of his neglecting to send the papers to-day!" she exclaimed for the twentieth time.

Net laughed.

"Poor Jobson!" she said, "any one of a dozen accidents may have happened to prevent his sending the papers. And as to his 'monopoly,' it hardly puts bread enough into his hungry children's mouths! I wish you could see them, poor things!"

"Oh, Net, I am a selfish wretch, and all my goodness is not skin deep! The minute anything crosses me, I am bad! That is, I mean, I find out how bad I am!" said Arielle, half lightly, half penitently.

Net did not contradict or flatter her. It was not Net's way.

Still another weary day and night passed, and then at length something happened; but it was not what they had expected.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### VIVIENNE'S WOE

Sorrow and sin, and suffering and strife,
Have now been cast in the stream of my life;
And they have gone up to the fountain head,
And all that flows thence is embitteréd.
Yet still that fountain up to Heaven springs,
And still the stream, where'er it wanders, sings
And still, where'er it hath found leave to rest,
The blessed sun looks down upon its breast;
And it reflects, as in a mirror fair,
The image of all beauty shining there.

F. A. KEMBLE.

LORD BEAUDEVERE continued his daily visits to Yockley prison, although the journey there and back, and the hour spent with his unhappy kinsman, took the whole of every day.

So long as he could prevent Jobson from sending the newspapers to Montjoie Castle and to Cloudland he had hopes that the disastrous news of Valdimir Desparde's ar-

rest and imprisonment on the terrible charge of murder might not reach the ladies of either house, for Lady Arielle lived in strict seclusion since the death of her grandfather, and Miss Desparde was confined to her room by a severe cold.

But as the days went on, and the news spread from one to another all over the country, until it was in everybody's mouth, Lord Beaudevere perceived how futile were his plans to keep it concealed from his wards.

Any day, a word from a tradesman might reveal the calamity to a servant or a child, who might bring it suddenly to either of the houses from which he so earnestly desired to keep it.

He deemed it, therefore, best that he should himself gently break the matter to Vivienne and send her with the intelligence to Lady Arielle.

In accordance with this plan, he delayed his daily visit to Valdimir for a couple of hours, and met Vivienne at breakfast, to which she was now sufficiently recovered to come down.

She herself unwittingly led up to the subject.

"Oh, indeed!" she exclaimed, as soon as she entered the breakfast room and saw him waiting there for her. "You do not mean to say that you are going to sit down to the table with me this morning? Why, I have not had the honor of your company for seven days! What has happened? Is the lost jewel, the great diamond, Sirius, found at last? If so, when shall I see my truant brother? Or is he detained to identify his property and—the thief?" she saucily demanded.

"Pour out my coffee, Vivi, and I will tell you all about it after breakfast," replied the baron.

The girl sat down and did as he desired.

After breakfast was over the baron arose and said:

"Come into the library, my love. I have something to say to you."

His manner and tone of voice alarmed the girl, and prepared her in some degree for what she was destined to hear.

She followed her guardian into the library, sat down opposite him, and leaning upon the table, said:

"Now, Beaue, I know by your looks, that you have bad news to tell me! Out with it! Don't *break* it to me for

pity's sake! *Breaking* bad news is like amputating the dog's leg an inch at a time! Tell me in one word. What has happened to Valdimir?"

"Then, in one word, he is in *prison,*" answered the baron solemnly.

The girl stared at him as if she did not comprehend.

"He is—*what?*" she demanded, in an uncertain tone.

"Valdimir is in *prison,*" repeated the baron.

"'In prison?'" slowly echoed the girl, still staring at the speaker—"'in prison?' Why—how is that? How can that be? Is Valdimir in debt! In debt beyond his ability to pay? Oh, Beaue! Why did you not tell me! *Now* I know what you meant by the most precious jewel that he had lost! It was not the diamond Sirius. It was his precious *liberty* that he had lost! Oh, Beaue, why did you not tell me the truth and not prevaricate with me? I would have given every penny I possess in the world to release Valdimir! You know it, Beaue!" exclaimed the girl, as the tears sprang to her eyes.

"My dear," replied the baron, in a choked voice, "I also would give every farthing I own on earth to release Valdimir from prison, if money could do it! But money cannot do it, my girl. All the money in all the banks in this world could not do it! Valdimir is not in prison for *debt,* Vivienne."

"BEAUE!! What do you mean? What is Valdimir in prison for?" cried the girl, growing marble pale.

"Brace yourself, Vivienne! Be firm! There is *nothing to fear.* Be sure of that. Now, do you believe me when I tell you that there is nothing, absolutely *nothing,* to fear for your brother?" earnestly inquired the baron, taking her hand and looking deeply into her wild and terrified eyes.

"Yes, yes, of course, I believe you, Beaue! I could never seriously doubt your word. But—*what*—oh! *what* is my brother in prison for?" she cried, clasping and wringing her hands.

"On a charge—— Be firm now, Vivienne, for the charge can be disproved! I assure you that it can, and you must believe me——"

"Yes! yes! But what is the charge?" she demanded, wringing her hands.

*"Murder."*

Vivienne shrieked and covered her face with her hands.

"I told you it could be disproved, my dear," said the baron, gently.

Vivienne did not answer.

"I told you there was nothing to fear for Valdimir," continued the baron.

She did not reply.

"And there really *is* nothing to fear. He is sure to be acquitted. I hope you believe me, Vivienne."

"He—has—been—fighting a duel, then, and killed his antagonist?" she inquired, as if each word tortured her in its utterance, and without uncovering her face.

"No, no, dear! I am happy to assure you that he has not. He has not been fighting at all. He has not killed anybody. Did I not tell you the charge was a false one?" inquired the baron, in an encouraging tone of voice.

"Then, how came he to be accused?" demanded the girl, dropping her hands from her deadly pale face and raising eyes wild with anguish to the face of her guardian.

"It is a case of circumstantial evidence, sure to be disproved, my love. I will tell you all about it. Come! rally yourself! You are a brave young woman!"

"Give me a glass of water, Beaue," she asked, in a faint voice.

The baron went to a little private cabinet of his own and poured out a small glass of rich old port and made her drink it all.

The cordial old wine revived her failing powers, and she sat back in her chair and prepared to listen.

Then Lord Beaudevere told her, as gently and delicately as he possibly could tell such a tale, the story of the reserved compartment taken by the mysterious stranger for himself and his female companion at Paddington, and afterwards ignorantly and innocently entered at the Grand Junction by Valdimir Desparde, who found what he believed to be a sleeping woman as the sole other occupant of the compartment, and who traveled all the rest of the way to Miston Branch Junction with the corpse of a murdered woman, for whose assassination he had been falsely arrested and imprisoned.

"But do not be anxious, my dear. Of course, such a

charge as that can be fully disproved," said the baron, in concluding his story.

"Who was the woman—do they know?" inquired Vivienne, in a low voice.

"A girl that belonged to Miston, I regret to say—a girl who was once in the service of your young friend, Mrs. Fleming, and whose poor little letter to Lady Arielle saved her ladyship from an unfortunate marriage."

"Not Kit Ken?" exclaimed Vivienne, in amazement.

"Yes, poor Kit Ken."

"Oh, I am very sorry! Poor girl! Ah! then there can be no doubt as to *who* her slayer was."

"You suspect Brandon Coyle?"

"I *more* than suspect him, for I heard the words and saw the scowl of vengeance with which he left Castle Montjoie on the day poor Kit's letter was read."

"Oh, ah, yes! *you* heard those threats of vengeance, did you, my dear?"

"Indeed I did! and I saw the look that accompanied them."

"We may, then, want you to testify. But, Vivienne, do you know—have you any idea where the scamp went when he left Castle Montjoie?"

"Not the slightest. How should I, Beaue?"

"I thought possibly you might have seen or heard through Aspirita."

"No, indeed; I have not set eyes on Aspirita, or got a word from her, since the day she left Castle Montjoie. I feel very sorry for the humiliation of that poor girl. It certainly is not her fault that her brother is a villain," said Vivienne, who was far from suspecting how deeply imbued the sister was with the brother's hereditary evils.

"The detectives are looking him up, but they have got no trace as yet. And now, Vivienne, my dear, I wish you to go to Castle Montjoie and inform Lady Arielle of the situation of affairs, before she can hear of it from any other source."

"Oh, Beaue! what a terrible task to impose upon me! I cannot! I cannot, indeed! Besides, I intend to go with you this morning, and see my poor, dear brother," replied the young lady.

"I am not going to see him to-day. He will be engaged

with his counsel the whole day. Do you know his trial is fixed for Monday week?"

"Good Heaven, Beaue!"

"I told you not to be afraid. He is certain to be honorably acquitted. But what I wish to impress upon you now is the fact that he will not have time to receive a visit from you to-day. So you had better go this morning to Castle Montjoie."

"Beaue! I will go there with *you* if you choose to take me; but I will not go alone to carry the burden of such a terrible story to Lady Arielle—especially after deluding *her* as well as myself with mistaken theories of Valdimir's detention! I will not, Beaue!" said Vivienne, in a tone that assured the baron all further argument would be useless.

"Well, well, perhaps I had better go with you, if it is only to set the poor fellow in a proper light before his lady's eyes. Be ready as soon as you can, my dear. I will order the carriage," said Lord Beaudevere.

"I will be ready in fifteen minutes, Beaue," replied Vivienne, hurrying away to her own chamber.

Arrived there, however, she stood still in the middle of the floor, transfixed by the thought that her brother was in prison on the charge of murder, and was about to be tried for his life! She forgot everything else, until a footman rapped at the door, with his lord's compliments and the carriage was waiting.

Then she started, went to a wardrobe, threw a sable circular around her shoulders, put on a velvet hat, seized her muff and gloves and ran downstairs to join her guardian.

"Is *this* what you call fifteen minutes, my dear? I waited twenty before I sent for you," said the baron as he handed her into the carriage.

"I beg your pardon, Beaue. I did not know," she answered, vaguely and with a deep sigh.

"Vivienne, you do not place confidence in me when I assure you that your brother's life and honor are in no serious danger," said Lord Beaudevere, as they drove on; and he noticed her continued depression of spirits.

"Oh, I do, I do, Beaue! But do you think it possible for me to rally my spirits while my brother is in prison

on such an awful charge?" she murmured, between pale lips.

"But, my dear, I hope you will be able to command yourself before we go into Arielle's presence. She has been very severely tried of late."

"Beaue," said the young lady, very sadly, "I think there is another trouble and disappointment in store for poor Valdimir. Even when he shall be honorably acquitted of this charge there is another against him that he cannot disprove and Arielle will not condone."

"And what is that?" inquired the baron, elevating his eyebrows.

"Valdimir's low marriage! The death of his wife and child may have freed him from the ties, but cannot affect his future relations with Lady Arielle, who will never condone the offense," answered Vivienne.

"'His low marriage!' Rubbish! Valdimir never was married!" impatiently exclaimed the baron.

"No? Why—we all believed—the detectives all told—I don't understand," muttered Vivienne, with a perplexed look.

"The detectives were all at sea; all misled by false appearances. Listen, said the baron; and he began and told the story of Valdimir Desparde's accidental meeting with Annek Yok and her child on the pier at New York, the morning of his arrival there, and of his subsequent care of the poor widow and her babe until he placed them under the protection of her two brothers in New Orleans; of their final death by yellow fever, and of Valdimir Desparde's devotion to the sufferers from the fearful plague during the whole period of its reign.

"Oh, I am so rejoiced at that; or I should be if Valdimir were not in prison. At any rate I—it is a drop of comfort in my cup of sorrow. But, since it was not a low marriage that drove Valdimir so suddenly from his native shores, *what on earth was it?*" earnestly demanded Vivienne.

"Ah! thereby hangs another tale. I do not know that I shall have a better opportunity of telling you than the present one. I will save time. Now give me your attention," said the baron.

And while Vivienne listened with the most sympathetic

interest, Lord Beaudevere gave her first of all a sketch of Brandon and Aspirita Coyle's early history, with the disgraceful career and ignominious death of their father, under the false *alias* of a noble name—that of Desparde—and of the fraud practiced upon Valdimir by Brandon, which was rendered practicable and even plausible by the identity of names and the total ignorance in which young Desparde had been left of his own early history.

"And my brother believed himself to be the son of that executed murderer, who had taken his father's stainless name for an *alias!*" exclaimed Vivienne, in surprise and scorn.

"Yes, circumstances seemed to bear out the story told by Brandon Coyle."

"I hope it is not necessary to tell Arielle such a horrible tale," added Vivienne.

"No; it will be only necessary to say that a deception had been practiced upon Valdimir by making him believe that his own father had been guilty of a felony which had been committed by a villain who had assumed his name. I shall not go into particulars with Lady Arielle; it would be exceedingly bad form for me to do so. All that she will need to know is, that Valdimir was never married to any one, and never unfaithful to her in thought, word or deed; but that he left in the way he did from the most honorable motives. I shall assure Lady Arielle of this and leave my boy's fate, with great confidence, in her hands."

This conversation had occupied the whole two hours of their journey and ceased only as their carriage passed under the great archway.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### ARIELLE'S VISITORS ARRIVE

Oh, there are moments for us here, when seeing
  Life's inequalities, and woe, and care,
The burdens laid upon our mortal being
  Seem heavier than the human heart can bear.

For there are ills that come without foreboding,
  Lightnings that fall before the thunder's roll,
And these festering cares that by corroding
  Eat silently their way into the soul.

And for the evils that our race inherit,
  Is no strength given us that we may endure?
Yes! for the Heavenly Father of our spirit
  Permits no sorrow that He cannot cure.

PHEBE CARY.

IT was noon, and the two friends, Arielle Montjoie and Net Fleming, were sitting together in the morning room, trying to interest themselves in the silk flower embroidery that Arielle had learned from the late countess and was now attempting to teach Net. But the young lady was rather absent minded, and made many mistakes.

"Arielle, dear, I never heard of a blue rose in my life! Surely——" began Net, but her teacher cut her short with:

"Am I beginning a rose with blue silk? So I am! I must have been thinking of a violet," and she unthreaded her needle and began to pick out the stitches.

"You were thinking of Valdimir Desparde," thought Net, but she said nothing.

"My Lord Beaudevere and Miss Desparde," said a footman, throwing open the door.

The baron and his young ward walked into the room.

Lady Arielle started and dropped her embroidery frame, but the next instant she recovered her self-possession and received her visitors with all that patrician repose

"That marks the caste of Vere de Vere."

Net followed her example, and when their mutual greetings were over, seats were offered and accepted by the new arrivals.

Arielle was "expiring" for news of Valdimir, but not to have prolonged her own life would she have put the question in regard to him before learning whether he were worthy of her interest.

Net felt no such reluctance to make inquiries. She sympathized with Arielle's anxiety and almost shared it, and she compassionated the dreary pride that prevented the young lady from relieving her own suspense; and so she turned to Lord Beaudevere and said:

"It was very vexatious—Mr. Desparde having been robbed of that family jewel, just as he arrived in the country after so long an absence. I hope he has recovered it, or got such a clew that he may do so soon and come home to his friends."

"No, my dear, he has not yet recovered it, and he is still detained by its loss and occupied in trying to regain it," replied Lord Beaudevere, evasively.

Lady Arielle secretly thanked Net for the question and eagerly listened to the answer and to all the words that followed.

"What hope is there of his recovering it?" inquired Net.

"Every hope, my dear. A jewel of that value cannot long be lost."

"And when shall we see Mr. Desparde—at Christmas? It is very near, you know."

"I trust so, my dear Mrs. Fleming."

Net said no more, and after a few moments' silence Lord Beaudevere turned to his youngest ward and said:

"Arielle, my love, I have a little business to transact with you. Will you favor me with a few minutes' conversation in the library?"

"Certainly, my dear guardian, if our friends here will excuse us," replied the young lady, with a smile on her companion.

"Of course." "Assuredly," answered the two visitors, with ready courtesy.

"And Vivienne, you may enlighten Mrs. Fleming while

we are gone," said the baron, as he gave his arm to his ward and led her out of the room.

When they reached the library, Lord Beaudevere made Arielle sit down in the great arm chair that had once been her grandfather's.

Then he drew another and seated himself beside her and took her hand, saying:

"Arielle, my dear child, I have both good and ill news to tell you. But, to fortify your mind, I will tell you first of all that Valdimir Desparde is alive and in health, and that he is worthy of your continued regard."

She had grown very pale at the first clause of his speech, and now, at the concluding words, she flushed rosy red.

"A false story was brought to us, my love, through a mistake of the detectives, and a *forged* letter was sent to you by a dastardly traitor! Valdimir Desparde was never faithless to you, Arielle; he was never married, nor ever attracted to any woman save yourself."

The baron paused to note the effect of these words on Lady Arielle.

Her face was radiant with the flush of joy, her eyes beaming with light.

"I had sometimes thought he was faithful, in the face of all adverse evidence. In the face of his flight upon our wedding morning, and the detective's report of his wife and child, and the forged letter confessing his marriage—yes, in the face of all these, I have in my heart of hearts dared to believe that he was faithful! Yet I could not act upon this belief," murmured Arielle, in a tone of joy too deep for expression.

"The heart is often wiser than the head, my Arielle. And now, do you surmise who the forger of that false letter was?"

"Yes, I do. It was Brandon Coyle."

"The very same, my dear. The remorseless villain who has been at the root of all your woes; whose fraudulent story, supported by unfortunate circumstances, it was that sent my young kinsman, in his unstained honor, a most wretched fugitive from his native land!"

"Oh, how could he do that?" breathed Arielle.

"You shall hear later, my dear. Brandon Coyle had all the subtlety, duplicity, and malignity of an incarnate

fiend. He paused at nothing. Lately, I think, he has added murder to his list of crimes."

"*Murder?*" uttered Lady Arielle, in a half-suppressed cry.

"Yes, my dear. Very sorry I am to enter upon such a theme with you; but I began by warning you, my love, that I had bad news to communicate as well as good," said the baron, solemnly.

"But—since Valdimir is alive, well and constant, and since nearly all I love in the world are under this roof, at this hour, I do not see what ill news you have to tell that can affect us—Stay!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Has that evil man—injured—killed—any one in whom we are interested? Not—not his uncle?" inquired the young lady, in a half-hushed voice.

"No, not his uncle," answered the baron.

"I—feared it might be so from the way in which you spoke, and from remembering that the uncle and nephew had left here in bad blood, and the first had threatened to make a will and disinherit the last."

"It was not old Mr. Coyle, who is alive and well. Yet it was some one in whom we are all interested somewhat," answered the baron, watching the effect of his words on his hearer.

But Lady Arielle only looked perplexed and compassionate.

"Who was it, then, Baron?" she inquired.

"It was poor Kit Ken."

Lord Beaudevere was hardly prepared for the effect these words had upon Lady Arielle. She started forward, the blood rushed up to her temples, her eyes dilated and fixed themselves in a prolonged stare upon those of the speaker, and her voice was hoarse and almost inaudible as she echoed the words:

"*Kit Ken?*"

"Yes, my dear. But what is the matter? Surely——"

But before the baron could utter another word Lady Arielle had fallen back in her chair, her arms dropped by her side, her face pallid as that of a corpse, her eyes closed, and her lips open.

"Arielle! Arielle, my child! Why——" began the baron, and then he put forth his hand to ring the bell.

But her hand was laid on his to stop the action. Her touch was as cold as ice, and her voice was like the sigh of death as she inquired:

*"When did this occur?"*

"This death? This murder?"

"Yes."

"Thursday night, or perhaps Friday morning. The crime was committed at night in a railway carriage. Let me get you a glass of wine," said the baron, rising then and hurrying to the dining room, for he knew the ways of the house.

There he found the table laid for luncheon, and the footman in attendance.

Without calling on the servant at all he poured out a glass of sherry from a decanter that stood upon the table and took it into the library to Lady Arielle, who had already partly recovered from the shock she had received.

She took the glass, drank the wine, and thanked the baron.

"My dear, I regret very much having given you so rude a shock. I would not have done so could I have avoided the communication," said Lord Beaudevere, with much concern.

"Never mind, my dear guardian. Go on with your story. Do not be alarmed for me; I shall not fail again," said Arielle, rallying her spirits.

She did not tell the baron the real cause of her extreme agitation—the dream, or vision, she had had of poor Kit Ken, on the very night of her murder. She did not speak of this experience because she did not wish to be laughed at by the baron as she had been by Net Fleming.

But ah! Lord Beaudevere felt very unlike laughing at anything or anybody under present circumstances.

"Are you sure, my dear Arielle, that you can be brave and strong enough to hear the rest of this story?"

"Yes, I can, my guardian. Since Valdimir is alive, well, faithful, and not far off from us, I am not afraid to hear anything you have to tell me," answered Arielle.

Then indeed Lord Beaudevere began, and with as much tenderness and delicacy as it was possible to approach a subject so terrible and revolting, he told her the story of that horrible midnight ride from his own point of view,

beginning with the engagement of the reserved compartment on the Northwestern train, at Paddington Station, by an unknown man, for himself and his female companion, whom Lord Beaudevere did not hesitate to describe as Brandon Coyle and Kit Ken.

In this manner he led gradually up to the denouement of that night's doings, still from his own standpoint—telling how the man's form was concealed in a long ulster and his face shadowed by a cap with a low brim or visor; how he must have murdered his companion and arranged her figure and her dress to appear as if she were sleeping, and that he must have done all this between Peterborough and the Grand Junction, where he got off and quietly left the train to take some other.

How, at the Grand Junction, Valdimir Desparde, coming up from Southampton, had got on the train, and being also clothed in a black ulster, and having his head covered with a cap and his face shaded by the drooping visor, and being of the same height and size of Brandon Coyle, had been mistaken by the guard for the man who had engaged the reserved compartment and had by him been ushered into it.

How, finding the compartment dimly lighted and occupied only by one woman, whom he supposed to be sleeping, he had refrained from turning up the light, lest it should disturb the sleeper, and had ridden all the way to the Miston Branch Junction, and there left the train for the Miston special, quite ignorant that his traveling companion for so many hours was a corpse.

"And now, my dear Arielle, are you prepared for a misapprehension on the part of the authorities that has subjected us all to some annoyance and inconvenience?" inquired Lord Beaudevere, gently.

She changed color again, and began to tremble.

"They never can have suspected Valdimir Desparde of that assassination?" she faltered.

"Yes, my dear, they have; but the suspicion can be easily disproved," the baron hastened to say, fearing the consequences of his announcement.

"Is that—is that—what has detained him at Yockley?" she inquired.

"Yes, my dear, though his detention is but a matter of

a few days. As soon as we can find some of his fellow travelers who came up with him from Southampton, to prove an *alibi,* he will be set at liberty."

"Set at liberty!" echoed Lady Arielle, her blue eyes dilating with terror, with horror. "Why—why—he is not *restrained* of his liberty? Valdimir Desparde cannot be—they can never have dared to take *him* in custody!"

"My dear, the law is no respecter of persons; if he had been a prince of the blood royal, they would have taken him into custody under the circumstances! But do not be alarmed. It is an inconvenience, an annoyance, but nothing more. There can be no danger. It is only a matter of a little time," said the baron.

"When—was—he—taken?" falteringly inquired the girl.

"On the very morning of his arrival at Miston, where I met him at the station, and where we went to breakfast at the Dolphin. The murder was not discovered until the train reached Yockley. Then a party of ladies and children who were crowding into the carriage found out that the woman in the corner was a corpse, and gave the alarm. Investigation was made, and the guard, who had recognized Valdimir Desparde at the Grand Junction, and mistaken him for the man who had engaged for himself and his female companion the reserved compartment in which the girl was afterwards found murdered, gave information which caused a warrant to be made out for the arrest of Mr. Desparde."

"How long has Valdimir been—in prison?" inquired Arielle, as if the words choked her.

"Several days," answered the baron, after a pause for calculation.

"And all this time you have left me in ignorance of his condition, Lord Beaudevere!" said the girl, reproachfully.

"My dear, I had hoped that something would have turned up ere this to have set him at liberty, and that you might never have had occasion to be pained by the news of his arrest. I kept you in ignorance from this hope," replied the baron.

Many other questions were asked and answered, and then Arielle said:

"My dear guardian, you must take me to see my

betrothed to-morrow. I would go to-day were there time enough left."

"But, my dear Arielle!"

"It is of no use to argue with me, Lord Beaudevere! Valdimir *is* my betrothed! All that has happened since that broken wedding day is as a dream dispersed. I am going to visit my betrothed in his trouble," firmly replied the young lady.

"Well, well, my dear, I spoke only in your own interests. If you are resolved to go I will take you, and Vivienne also, to-morrow. And in this case I think that my cousin and myself will have to trespass on your hospitality to-night," said the baron.

"It will be a comfort to have you," replied Arielle, earnestly.

"I will send the coachman back with the carriage to tell the household not to expect us home to-night. And we can be indebted to you for the use of *your* equipage to take us to the train to-morrow."

This being agreed upon the baron arose and gave Lady Arielle his arm to take her back to join their friends in the drawing room.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### THE TEST OF LOVE

Mightier far
Than strength of nerve, or sinew, or the sway
Of magic, potent over sun and star,
Is love, though oft to agony distrest,
And though his favorite seat be feeble woman's breast.
WORDSWORTH.

Has she not set at naught her noble birth,
The high won fame of an historic race,
Peace of retirement and pride of woman?
Her prodigality has given him all. ROWE.

WHEN Lord Beaudevere and Lady Arielle returned to the drawing room, where they had left Mrs. Fleming and

Miss Desparde alone together, they discovered at a glance that Vivienne had put Net in possession of the whole truth in regard to the detention of Valdimir—the tragic fate of poor Kit Ken, and the accusation of her murder resting on Mr. Desparde.

They had scarcely resumed their seats before Net spoke up suddenly, impulsively:

"This is the most shocking event I have ever heard of in my life! But there is not the slightest doubt in the world as to the identity of the murderer! Have you caused Brandon Coyle to be looked up?" she finished by inquiring.

"Certainly, my dear! My suspicion fell upon that gentleman from the first, and it is supported by the opinion of poor Kit Ken's father. I have employed detectives to search for Coyle and watch him. *You* do not happen to have heard anything of him very lately?"

"Nothing whatever since he left Montjoie, after the discovery of his evil deeds."

"It is very strange the skilled detectives I have employed have not yet struck his trail, as the North American Indians would say. But I expect almost hourly to hear from them on the subject."

"In the meantime the trial draws ominously near!" sighed Vivienne.

Lady Arielle grew pale.

"Nonsense! Nonsense, my dears! You must not take a dark view of this subject! There was scarcely evidence enough before the magistrate to justify him in committing Valdimir for trial! Even if nothing should be heard of the real criminal, there is certainly not evidence enough to convict Desparde in the opinion of any judge or jury that ever existed! But I am convinced that we shall get news before the trial. Have *some* faith in the protection of Divine Providence over the innocent."

"Sometimes the innocent are permitted to suffer," thought Net, but she said nothing.

"And now, my obstinate dears, about your visit to our Valdimir," began the baron. "As I explained before, it is now too late to catch any train by which we could reach Yockley before six o'clock this evening—the hour at which the prison doors are closed for the night. And in order that we may start early enough to-morrow, to get home

again the same day, you will have to be up and get your breakfast by five o'clock. Do you hear *that,* young ladies? You will never do it unless I am on hand to ring the alarm bell in the morning. I will wake up the butler, who will wake up the page, who will wake up the ladies' maids, who will wake up their ladies—and so on and so on—like the people in *'The House that Jack built,'* or in the story of *'The Little Old Woman and her Pig.'"*

"You know that we will be very glad to have you, Baron," said Lady Arielle.

"And now, my dears, if I have not time to return to Cloudland, I have enough to run down and see my old neighbor Coyle—poor old fellow! how I feel for him! But he has turned off his scamp of a nephew, that is one comfort. I know Brandon is not there; but I *may* hear something that will give me a clew. Plague take it. I feel deucedly like a *spy,* going on such an errand to an old neighbor's house; but I cannot help it! 'Blood is thicker than water,' and I must do the best I can for my kinsman, who is suffering now for his nephew's crimes!" said the baron, as he rang the bell.

"Will you not take lunch first?" inquired Arielle.

"No, my dear—don't want any! I will be back to dine with you, and will bring a splendid appetite with me," replied the baron.

Adams entered in answer to the bell.

"You will lend me a saddle-horse, Arielle?"

"Certainly, Lord Beaudevere. You need scarcely have asked the question. You know the horses. Pray give your own orders," replied the young lady.

"Adams, tell one of the grooms to saddle Muff for me, and some other steady horse for himself, and bring them around to the door," said the baron.

His orders were promptly complied with, and the groom and horses were announced as waiting.

"I shall return in time for your dinner, my dear," said the baron to Lady Arielle as he took leave of the young party and left the room.

In ten more minutes he was mounted on horseback and going on at a brisk, steady trot towards Caveland.

In a little more than an hour's time, by taking all the narrow bridle paths through the short cuts, he reached his

destination, and drew up before the dark, old mansion house.

He alighted, threw his reins to the groom, and hurried up the steps to the principal entrance, which was in one of the towers.

A porter opened to him.

"Is Mr. Coyle at home?" he inquired.

"Yes, my lord. Here, Tompkins! Show his lordship into the library," replied the porter, who belonged to a household that never stood upon ceremony with their neighbors, and who, therefore, neither asked for nor expected a card.

The footman bowed and walked down the hall, opened a side door and announced:

"His lordship, Baron Beaudevere."

The baron entered the library, and the footman closed the door upon him and retired.

Lord Beaudevere found old Mr. Coyle, wrapped in a blue cloth dressing gown, wearing a black velvet skull cap, seated in his leathern arm chair and bending over his writing table, which seemed laden with papers, documents, and account books.

He arose to meet his visitor, took off his skull cap with his left hand, and bowed as he held out his right.

"Pray replace your cap, neighbor. I hope I find you quite well," said Lord Beaudevere, though with little confidence, as he noticed how thin, worn and aged the once rotund and rubicund old gentleman looked.

"I am not well, my lord—shall never be well again, probably—do not wish to get well, in point of fact. But never mind me. Take this easy chair, if you please, my lord," said he, drawing forward a large, well-cushioned "sleepy hollow."

"Do not say that, my dear old friend! Many would deeply regret your departure from among us," said the baron, as he sank down into the luxurious depths of the offered seat.

"Why should I wish to live—why should I wish to live—or why should any friend desire me to live, when my gray hairs are dishonored, my heart broken, and my spirit bowed by the misconduct of my nephew—my nephew,

whom I brought up even as a son, and meant to have made my heir?" bitterly exclaimed the old man.

The baron would willingly have demanded, "Where is that nephew now?" but his conscience would not allow him to ask the question he was burning, for his own kinsman's sake, to have answered, yet which he thought would be treacherous, under the circumstances. So he said nothing, while his looks expressed the sympathy he felt for the afflicted old gentleman.

"Oh, my lord, I do not hesitate to speak to you freely. You are the oldest living friend I have in the world, and you know already of that unfortunate boy's evil doings! You will know still more, as all the world must know more in a very few days or hours," continued old Mr. Coyle, with a deep sigh.

Lord Beaudevere had started and then given deep attention to the last few words of the stricken old man. He would "know still more, as all the world would know still more, in a few days or hours?" What might this mean but that Brandon Coyle's last worst crime had been traced in some providential way to him and he was known as the assassin of Kit Ken?

To this conclusion the baron arrived at once, and then he spoke:

"I am truly sorry that *you* should suffer so severely for the fault of one whom you have nourished in your house," he said, in sympathetic tones.

"And this last dishonor," continued the old man—"this last dishonor! You will know it all through tomorrow's papers!" sighed Mr. Coyle.

"How came this to your knowledge?" the baron felt justified in asking, for he was thinking only about the murder in the railway carriage.

"Through my bankers, of course!" answered the old man, raising his eyes in some astonishment to the face of the questioner.

"Through your *bankers,* my dear sir? I—I don't quite understand," said the baron.

"Ah—ah, yes! I was talking as if you knew something of the matter, whereas as yet you know nothing; but my head is sadly shaken by this trouble. Yes, my lord, it was through my bankers! You must know that towards the

last days in December I always draw out of my bank account more than enough cash to meet all demands upon me for the remainder of the year, and at the same time I send for my bank book and cancelled checks that I may see to my balance. I did this a few days ago, and to my utter amazement I found among my checks one for five thousand pounds, dated the fifteenth of December. It was apparently filled out by my own hand writing, and signed by my own autograph. I could almost have sworn to it all as my own work! Yet I knew it was a foul forgery! I had not drawn a check for five thousand pounds for many years. My checks seldom run over a hundred at a time."

"And this was a forgery, you say?" inquired the baron, wondering how this could be connected with the murder of poor Kit Ken, yet persuaded that it was.

"Yes, sir, a rank, rank forgery! I inclosed it in a letter to the bankers, telling them that it was a forgery, and demanding to know who had presented it to be cashed. Ah, my lord! little did I suspect *who* was the guilty party, though, indeed, I might easily have done so; and *if* I had, I should never have written to the bankers, never have made a sign, or given a hint, that it was a forgery, but should have let it go with the rest! Ah! if we could but know some of the results of our actions beforehand! Well, my lord, the bankers did not wait to answer my letter; they telegraphed to me that the man who presented my check for five thousand pounds, on the fifteenth of December, was Mr. Brandon Coyle."

"It must have been a great shock to you. I am very sorry," said Lord Beaudevere, earnestly; for for the first time it struck him that the murder was committed on the fifteenth of December, and if Mr. Brandon Coyle was uttering forgeries in London, he could not at the same date be committing murder in the North of England, and that young Coyle might be able to prove an *alibi* more easily than could Valdimir Desparde. The thought was not an encouraging one, and Lord Beaudevere sighed deeply.

Poor old Mr. Coyle took it as a sigh of deepest sympathy for him, and he continued:

"Yes, sir, it was a great shock! a very great shock! As soon, however, as I could recover from it far enough

to collect and use my faculties, I only thought of the family credit, and I telegraphed the bank to take no proceedings against the presenter of that check, but let it stand to my account. I was willing to acknowledge it and pay it."

"And did the bankers consent to this?" slowly inquired the baron.

"No, sir! No, sir! They telegraphed back to me that they would *not* let it stand to my account; that they would lose it; that they would rather lose ten times the amount than compound a felony and allow a forger to escape; that the financial and commercial safety of the commonwealth depended on the strictness and severity with which justice should be meted out to the forger—and ever so much of the same sort of banker's slang. Yes, sir, they are resolved to prosecute my nephew. All that I have told you they telegraphed to me—by the yard! but they also wrote a letter, which I have just received, and in which they have gone somewhat in detail——"

"Ah, they gave you further particulars as to the hour, perhaps!" exclaimed the baron, much interested.

"Oh, yes, they told me that he—my nephew, Brandon—presented himself to the paying teller's window as soon as the bank doors were open——"

"Oh! as early as ten o'clock, then, I suppose," interrupted the baron, with a feeling of great relief; for if Brandon Coyle uttered his forged check at ten o'clock A. M. in London, he would have ample time to reach the Grand Junction or any other North of England station to do any deed of evil there before midnight.

"Oh, yes, it was about that hour the bank opened, I presume. Well, they wrote that he appeared to be in a great hurry, and told them that I had sent *him* down for the money for safety and dispatch, as I was about to purchase that portion of Squire Honeythorn's estate which joins my own land—a very plausible story, especially as I *had* often expressed a wish to buy that same property, and also as I always sent my nephew, when I could not go myself, to cash a check for a large sum. They further warned me that they had procured a warrant for the arrest of the forger, and sent officers with it in search of him, expressing

much regret that a sense of duty should compel them to this course."

"I am *very* sorry to hear that you have this trouble, Mr. Coyle," said the baron.

"It *is* hard," replied the old man. "I abjured matrimony myself! But my brother had to marry and give me a niece, and that niece had to dishonor the family by the lowest marriage she could have fallen into, and bestowed upon me this grand-nephew with his inherited vileness. Yes, it is hard!"

"It is a pity that in adopting him you should have given him your own name," observed Lord Beaudevere.

"It is a thousand pities! But, do you suppose I would have done it if I could have foreseen this result? I did hope by good training to bring the lad up to be an honest and honorable man! But there! All the cultivation in the world will not turn a poisonous weed into a wholesome vegetable! Men never have been able to gather 'figs of thorns' yet," concluded the squire.

"I hope your niece, Miss Coyle, has not yet heard of this trouble," said the baron.

"No, no, I have not told her. I shall keep it from the poor girl as long as I can, for she is devoted to her brother with that strong love that binds twins, you know. Why she is scarcely on speaking terms with me since I turned the scamp off!"

"I regret to hear it," said the baron.

"But my dear lord," said the old squire, with some change of tone and look, "while I am so absorbed in my own woes, I have not altogether forgotten yours! Ah! our young people are giving us a great deal of trouble in our old days! I have seen the newspaper accounts of that tragedy in the railway carriage."

"You never for an instant believed that my kinsman was guilty?" tartly inquired Lord Beaudevere.

"I did not know *what* to believe. After discovering my own nephew, in whom I had had so *much* confidence, to be such an unscrupulous villain, my faith was shaken in Valdimir, especially when I remembered his extraordinary and unexplained flight from the country on his wedding day last spring," said the old squire, deprecatingly.

Lord Beaudevere could have explained that extraordi-

nary flight, not very much to the credit of the squire's nephew; but not for the world would he have added *that* weight to the burden of the worthy old man's troubles. He thought, also, that Mr. Coyle, remembering the relations that had existed between his evil nephew and the poor victim of the railway tragedy, might have reasonably suspected Mr. Brandon Coyle of having had a hand in the death of Kit Ken. But he forbore also to express this thought.

"I do not see that there was much evidence against him. Any man might have been caught in such a trap by getting into a railway compartment where there was no other passenger but the body of a murdered woman cunningly arranged to look like a sleeping one. Yes, any man might. *I* might, or you might. No, I do not think there was evidence enough to commit him. But as there was no one else to lay hold of, I suppose the magistrates felt bound to commit somebody; so they committed him. Of course, you have engaged good counsel for his defense?" asked the squire.

"The very best that could be obtained—Mr. Stair and Mr. Turner," replied Lord Beaudevere.

"Ah! indeed, strong heads, both of them. Why, either of them would be acute enough to secure an acquittal, even if his client were ever so guilty, and every one of the jury knew it for a fact! You may safely trust your kinsman's case to them. Why, they'd talk the judges out of their senses and the jury into a state of idiotic complacency in no time at all!"

"We do not want that sort of thing. We want clear-headed, intelligent justice, in an honorable acquittal," said the baron.

"Well, and you will be sure to get it. Ah! I wish there were the smallest chance of an acquittal for my scamp of a nephew. But my only hope for him is in his flight. I do really suppose he has secured that, by putting the sea between himself and the English law. It must be so, for neither I nor his sister have heard from him since the night of his—his—his exposure at Castle Montjoie," concluded the old squire.

Lord Beaudevere had now gathered all the news that he

could get—not very satisfactory on the whole—and so arose to take leave.

"I thank you for this visit, my lord. It has really done me good," said the poor old squire, cordially, rising and taking the offered hand of his departing visitor.

"I am glad it has been so, and if I can in any manner be of use to you in your trouble, my dear old friend, pray command me," replied the baron, feeling very much like a hypocrite and a traitor when he remembered the motive of that visit for which the stricken old man had thanked him so warmly.

"You are very kind, and I am truly grateful. But I doubt if you or any one under heaven can help me. The best news that could come to me would be that Brandon Coyle had been lost at sea!" sighed the poor squire, as he shook and pressed the hand of his old neighbor.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### A VISIT TO VALDIMIR

Love's heralds should be thoughts
Which ten times faster glide than the sunbeams,
Driving back shadows over lowering hills.
Therefore do nimble-pinioned doves draw Love,
And therefore hath the wind swift Cupid wings.

SHAKESPEARE.

With thee all scenes are sweet; each place hath charms—
Earth, sea, alike our world within our arms.

BYRON.

LORD BEAUDEVERE kept his appointment, and reached Castle Montjoie in time to dress for dinner; but only in time, for he had to go at once to his chamber, make a hasty toilet, and descend to the drawing room, where he found the three young ladies waiting for him.

In answer to their eager questions, he told them that old Mr. Coyle knew nothing of Brandon's whereabouts, and that therefore he had been disappointed in his hope of obtaining a clew to the fugitive.

He forbore to tell them the news of Brandon Coyle's heavy forgery. His sympathies for the poor old squire kept him silent upon this subject of the family dishonor.

Dinner was at once announced, and they all went into the dining room.

Lord Beaudevere had gained a fine appetite from his long ride in the crisp, cold air, and moreover he highly approved the young countess's cook; therefore, nothwithstanding other adverse circumstances, he greatly enjoyed his dinner.

The two children were brought in at dessert, and had their treat of nuts, fruit and cake; after which they were remanded to their nursery, and the three young ladies withdrew to the drawing room, leaving Lord Beaudevere at the table.

The baron, however, never sat long over his wine. He soon joined them.

Then, instead of their usual evening recreation of music, chess or backgammon, they gathered around the fire and talked only of their beloved prisoner.

They were interrupted at length by the postman's knock, which the hall footman answered.

They listened eagerly, and soon Adams came into the room with only one letter on his silver waiter.

"For Mrs. Adrian Fleming, my lady," he answered to the inquiring look of the countess, as he took the waiter across the room to Net.

"It is from Deloraine, Devon, but in a strange handwriting. I fear—I fear—that Antoinette is worse," she exclaimed, as she gazed at the letter, and then hastily opened it.

"Who is it from?" impatiently inquired Vivienne.

"Her attendant physician—Dr. Bede," slowly and sadly answered Net, who was anxiously reading the few lines written on one page of note paper.

"How is she?" inquired Lady Arielle, eagerly.

"Antoinette is worse—much worse. Her physician writes at her request to tell me so, and to ask me to come at once without a day's delay, and to bring the children if I prefer to do so," mournfully replied Net.

"And you will go, of course," said Vivienne.

"Oh! I must! I must! I must go by the very first

train! *Dear* Lord Beaudevere, is there any train that I can catch to-night?" she anxiously inquired, turning to the baron.

"My good young lady, certainly not. There is a train in the morning at eight-thirty. The time has been changed within a few days. We can catch *that* by getting up to-morrow morning at five o'clock. It is the same train by which we go."

"Then we can travel together," said Net.

"Yes, as far as the Miston Junction, but no farther. There we separate."

"You go North, we go South," put in Net.

"Exactly."

"And now," said wise Little Mammam, "as we have to rise so early in the morning, will you let me suggest that we retire immediately?"

"We will, and we will follow the suggestion," said Arielle.

And each of the party took a light, and they bade one another good-night and retired.

Punctually at five o'clock the next morning the baron was awakened from his slumbers by the rap of Adams.

In half an hour afterwards the travelers had dressed, breakfasted, and were ready to commence their journey.

The vehicle just held the party—Net filling the fourth seat.

The regular coach horses were not taken out for this long drive; but the strongest pair of draught horses were harnessed to the carriage, and the careful old coachman, Abraham, was on the box.

It was but a few minutes after five when they drove off in the darkness of the winter morning.

The carriage lamps had been trimmed and lighted, and the coachman knew his road and his horses, so that the journey seemed a safe one, notwithstanding the hour.

The conversation during the long drive turned exclusively upon the prisoner at Yockley and the invalid at Deloraine Park.

"What is the malady of Miss Deloraine?" inquired the baron of Net.

"I think they call it atrophy of the heart. It is hered-

itary in her mother's family," replied Net, as they drove on through the darkness.

They drove on as fast as the strong draught horses could draw them.

They came in sight of the spires of Miston Old Church just as the first faint light of morning was seen on the Eastern horizon, and they reached Miston Station as the first beams of the rising sun appeared above the hill tops.

They had ten minutes to spare, and these were spent in giving directions to old Abraham to put up the carriage and horses at the Dolphin for the day, and to meet them at the station for the seven P. M. train.

Then the baron put the three young ladies in the central compartment of a first-class carriage and went into a smoking car to enjoy his matutinal cigar.

In five more minutes the train was off.

The three girls, after a little more conversation among themselves, went off to sleep, as was very natural after having been disturbed in the morning's nap and fatigued by a long and rough drive.

They slept with little disturbance until the train reached Miston Junction, where they were awakened by the bustle of arrival.

Here the friends were to part company—Net to go down to Devonshire, and the others to go up to Yockley.

Lord Beaudevere threw away the stump of his cigar, got out of the smoking carriage and came to the door of the ladies' compartment to get them off.

"Your train is ready, my dear. It starts full fifteen minutes before ours. I shall have plenty of time to get you a seat in the ladies' carriage and commend you to the care of the guard. But *you* must hurry. Come on."

By this time the baron had led the way to the waiting room, where Net hastily kissed her two girl friends goodbye and followed Lord Beaudevere to the next train, where he got for her a safe and comfortable seat in a carriage full of ladies, and where he put a half sovereign into the hand of the guard as an inducement to look after the safety and comfort of the young traveler.

Then he shook hands with Net, telling her to write or telegraph in case she should want service of any sort from him.

The train began to show signs of moving, so he left the carriage and returned to his own party in the waiting room.

As soon as their own train was ready he put the two young ladies in a reserved compartment, and not wishing to smoke another cigar, he joined them there.

This happened to be an express train, and the run to Yockley was a rapid one.

They reached the station at about eleven o'clock.

Lord Beaudevere engaged a fly, put his young companions in it, followed them and ordered the driver to go to Yockley prison.

The man was the same one whom his lordship had several times already engaged, and he touched his hat respectfully as he mounted his box and drove off.

"I must warn you, my dear, not to be shocked too severely by the appearance of the prison. It is not like a private house, nor even like any other public building."

"Oh, my dear Lord Beaudevere, I have seen the *outside* of several prisons, and I can judge from that the inside is not very attractive," replied Arielle with a sad smile.

Yet half an hour later, when they reached the high stone walls and rolled through the great iron gate of the prison yard, and saw the grim stone face, with its small, grated windows, of the prison house, Arielle lost all her courage and burst into a storm of tears.

Lord Beaudevere stopped the carriage to give her an opportunity of conquering her emotion and recovering her self-command.

Then they drove on to the doors of the prison and got out.

Arielle shuddered at the great, oaken, iron-bound doors, and the heavy lock chains, the bare stone walls, the bare flagged floors.

The baron stopped at the door of the warden's office to get the service of a turnkey, and then drew Arielle's arm within his own and led her up the stone steps.

Vivienne followed, with her veil drawn down over her face to conceal its irrepressible emotion.

Vivienne suffered equally with Arielle, but even her own Beaue forgot the sister's sorrow in the betrothed bride's bitter grief.

The baron whispered a word to the turnkey, who started off at once and opened the cell door and left it open before they came up.

Lord Beaudevere's money and care had converted the cold, bare prison cell into a palatial cabinet or closet.

It was into this place that the two young ladies were introduced.

Valdimir Desparde, in a carefully made morning toilet, was seated in the easy chair, leaning over his little writing table.

He turned his head on hearing approaching footsteps, and seeing Lord Beaudevere leading in Arielle Montjoie, the light of a sudden rapture irradiated his face, and he sprang up to meet them.

He held out both hands and clasped hers warmly, while he gazed into her eyes in anxious, questioning love. What he read there gave him courage to draw her to his bosom, and press his lips upon her brow. And hardly a syllable passed between them but the inevitable low-breathed words:

*"Oh, Arielle!"*

*"Oh, Valdimir!"*

"Speak to Vivienne! Speak to your sister! She is behind!" whispered the young girl, gently disengaging herself from her lover's embrace.

He turned to see his sister, and met her as warmly as he had met his betrothed bride.

And lastly he shook hands with his kinsman, and thanked him for bringing these dear ones to comfort him.

Then the two young ladies sat down on the sofa with Valdimir between them.

Lord Beaudevere occupied the seat of honor, the crimson damask, deeply-cushioned easy chair.

And then they talked freely of Valdimir's case and prospects, which the young man considered safe, notwithstanding that detectives had found no trace of Brandon Coyle, nor any passenger who remembered coming up by the London and Southwestern train with any gentleman answering to Valdimir Desparde's description.

"Nevertheless I am not a whit discouraged. And indeed, though my detention here is disagreeable enough and the occasion tragic enough yet I *cannot* help seeing a ludi-

crous side to this farce of falling into the trap of that railway carriage and being arrested for midnight murder. Me! whom it always hurt to have to kill a gnat!" said Valdimir, in a gay tone that was perhaps partly assumed to raise the depressed spirits of his visitors.

"The police are looking after Brandon Coyle on another count!" said Lord Beaudevere, impulsively; and he immediately regretted that he had done so.

"Indeed! But I do not wonder! On what other count?" inquired Valdimir.

"I will tell you another time, my boy. It is near your luncheon hour, is it not?" inquired Lord Beaudevere—"we will invite ourselves to lunch with you! I will go to the *White Bear* myself to cater for our luncheon!" said the baron, as he took his hat and walked out of the cell.

"My cousin told you all about my reason for leaving the country in the way I did, dearest?" asked Valdimir of his betrothed.

"Oh, yes, everything he thought I ought to know, and quite enough to vindicate you perfectly, Valdimir. But, oh, love, why should you have punished yourself, and me, and all your friends, for the sin of another? Even if the base story had been true it would not have been your fault! I should never have thought the less of you, Valdimir!" pleaded Arielle with a look and tone that assured him she knew not the depth of dishonor that would have fallen on his own guiltless head had that dreadful story been true—for *him*.

Very soon Lord Beaudevere returned, followed by two waiters from the *White Bear,* bringing every requisite for a most substantial and delicious lunch.

After this lunch, which was really enjoyed by all the party notwithstanding the grave surrounding circumstances, the waiters cleared the table and carried away all the *debris* and other articles, and the place was restored to tidiness.

After a little more conversation the baron told his young protégées that they must put on their coats and hats and be ready to go, for they had stayed to the last minute of their time.

The parting with the prisoner was a sad one, notwithstanding that he bore himself with the greatest cheerful-

ness, and that Lord Beaudevere promised to return every day to see him, and fetch and carry messages between Yockley and Montjoie.

After taking leave of Valdimir Desparde the party re-entered their carriage, that still waited at the prison gate, and drove fast to the station, where they just caught the train.

Much rested and comforted, the party entered upon their eight hours' drive to Castle Montjoie, where they arrived in safety about half past ten o'clock.

"All right here, Adams?" the baron inquired of the footman who opened the door to them.

"Oh, yes, my lord. All quite right, your lordship."

"Any letters by the night's mail?"

"Only one, my lord, and that was for Mrs. Fleming."

"Let me look at it. Unless it comes from Devonshire, where she has gone, it must be forwarded to her."

The footman handed this letter on his silver salver. Lord Beaudevere took it and examined it carefully.

"It is postmarked London, and directed to Mrs. Fleming's home in Church Lane. It has been sent on here. Come into the library a moment, Adams. I will put this letter in another envelope, and direct it, and do you put it in the carrier's box to-night. It may be important," said the baron.

And it was important, for it was that very letter which poor Kit Ken had cunningly written to Mrs. Fleming and left with her landlady to be forwarded after ten days, unless good news arrived of her.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### ANTOINETTE

She hath had her happy day—
  She hath had her bud and blossom
Now she pales and shrinks away,
  Death, into thy gentle bosom!
She hath done her bidding here;
    Angels dear,
Bear her loving soul above,
Seraph of the skies—dear love!

BARRY CORNWALL.

NET had never been on a long journey in her short life; and her present one was very long, from the extreme north of England to the extreme south, and it began in an obscure rural neighborhood and would terminate at a secluded hamlet and manor house, it involved several changes of trains.

There was but one cab on the station waiting for the doubtful chance of a fare. Net hired it.

Net got in and seated herself, and was soon rolling along an unfrequented road.

In an hour they reached the village of Deloraine.

Passing out of the village, half an hour's drive brought them to the great park gate—a strong portal of iron, guarded by a gothic lodge.

Here the cabman drew up, alighted and rang a bell.

A bare-headed, red-armed girl, with her sleeves rolled up, ran out of the lodge and swung open the wide doors of the gateway, closing the gates with a clang when the cab had passed, and then flying into the lodge and banging the door after her.

The cab finally reached the grand, old-style manor house of dark-colored brick.

The cabman got down from his seat, ran up the stairs and rang the bell, and then ran down again and opened the door for the young lady to alight.

Net paid him five shillings for her fare, and one over for his moderation, before she left the cab. Then she got

out and went up the steps, followed by the cabman carrying her valise.

The house door was already opened by a venerable old servant, whose gray hair needed no powder and whose grave and well-preserved livery expressed the good taste of his late masters.

"I hope Miss Deloraine is better this morning," were the first words of Net to this dignified old man.

"Much better, madam! Mrs. Fleming, I hope?" he said, with a low bow. "I will show you up."

The man opened a door on his right, and announced:

"Mrs. Fleming." Then closed the door upon her and retired.

Net found herself in a luxurious boudoir where every sense of seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, was wooed to enjoyment.

In this lovely bower, in a deep, soft resting chair sat Antoinette Deloraine, wrapped in a warm, loose dressing gown of pale blue satin, lined and wadded with quilled white silk. Her rich black hair was done up loosely in a net of white silk and pearl beads.

She held a handkerchief with some pungent essence on it, which now and then she placed to her nose.

Net took all this in at a glance at the instant she crossed the threshold of the room, and she could scarcely forbear a start and cry of pity and dismay as she gazed on the beautiful wreck before her. Antoinette had fallen away to mere skin and bone, and the white cambric handkerchief she held in her fingers was not whiter than her hands and face.

She arose to meet her visitor, and held out her hand with a smile that seemed to break Net's heart.

"My dearest, I hear that you are much better to-day?" said Net, striving with all her might to repress her emotions—for she thought: "If *this* is 'better,' what is worse?"

"Oh, yes, I am, indeed," answered Antoinette, dropping back in her seat, and smelling at her saturated handkerchief; "and I think it was the anticipation of your visit that gave me new life. As soon as I got Lord Beaudevere's telegram from the Miston Branch Junction yesterday morning, saying that he had just put you on the train, and that you would be here to-day, I rallied at once, and

have been better ever since. I thought you would have arrived by the twelve noon train, and gave orders for the carriage to meet you. Dear girl! You must have traveled all night to have got here so soon."

"Yes, I lost not an hour. I came straight on," said Net, as she sank down on a cushion at the side of her cousin.

"Why did not the baron tell me in his telegram that you would reach here by the earliest train?" said Antoinette, in a vexed tone. "I could then have sent the carriage for you."

"He did not know it, dear. He had advised me to stop over night in London, at his own town house, and he gave me a note to his housekeeper. But when I got to London I preferred to come down here by the night train. Antoinette, dearest, I wished to be with you as soon as possible," said Net, affectionately.

"Well, I am glad of the few hours more. Have you breakfasted? Your rooms are all ready. They are next to mine. Quite a suite for you and the children. Ah! but you have not brought the children?"

"No, dear; I thought it was better to leave them at Castle Montjoie in the care of Arielle than to bring them a long journey in this wintry weather."

"Yet I should like to see the little ones; but I suppose it was wise to leave them. Here I am talking and not thinking of your needs, Net. Have you breakfasted?"

"Yes, dearest, I have."

"Comfortably?"

"Oh, yes! I ate and drank good food with a good appetite—at the Deloraine Arms."

"Oh, yes; that is a very respectable little country inn, supposed to be under the special protection of the lords and ladies of the Manor of Deloraine! Ah, Net! I wonder if any prevising spirit whispered the fat landlady or her pompous head waiter that it was their future lady of the manor they were serving with breakfast?"

"Oh, Antoinette, dearest, do not talk in that way," said Net, in a tone of pain.

"Why not? You are the heiress presumptive and you will soon be the mistress of the manor," said the young girl, with great calmness.

"Oh, no! Do not say so! I trust, Antoinette, you will

yet recover, and live to be a happy wife and mother, and leave heirs behind you to enjoy—to inherit Deloraine Park," said Net, in a faltering and broken voice, forcing herself to hope against hope.

"*Now,* Net! for *you* to turn flatterer! But you mean well, my dear. No, Net, *I* know, and *you* know, if you will look the truth in the face, and be candid with yourself and me, that I shall never live to do as you say. I *cannot* live a month longer. I *may* not live an hour. But what of it, pray? Who am *I* that I should not go in my youth as countless myriads have gone before me? Every tick of that clock is the knell of some passing soul. Every hour sees many go—some, a second old, who only gasp and go! And others of all ages from that to an hundred years and more! I have lived to be nineteen. I have enjoyed my short life, but I do not fear to leave it. While I was in doubt whether I should stay or go, then indeed I was uneasy with uncertainty; but now that I know my fate, I am quite, quite satisfied," said the dying girl.

"Antoinette, dear, are you not talking too much for your strength?" tenderly inquired Net, who noticed, with grief, the faintness and occasional failure of her cousin's voice.

"No, because I am so much better, just at present! Besides, even if it hurt me, I should talk all the same! I like to talk!"

For all answer, Net kissed and caressed the hand that she still held in her own, as she sat on the cushion at her cousin's side, where she could come nearest in contact with her.

"Yes, Net, I am satisfied to go. I have felt enough to believe in the infinite wisdom and goodness of God; that He is the absolute Lord of life and death; that whenever He sees fit for a human being to go out of this world, that human being—he or she—will go, and it will be the very best thing that could happen to him or to her. Infinite Love and Wisdom is doing the best for us, all the time, whether we believe it or not."

At this moment a rosy, middle-aged matron, clothed in a soft gray woolen dress, white muslin cap and black silk apron, came softly into the room, with a small silver waiter

in her hand, having on it something covered over with a white napkin.

This was the day nurse of the heiress of Deloraine Park.

She courtesied to the visitor, and then went on to the side of the young invalid.

Net pressed the thin hand she had held up to this moment, and then released it and arose to make way for the nurse.

"Miss Deloraine, my dear, you must not talk any more this morning. Here is your beef tea and port wine. You are to take it, dear, and then try to sleep."

"If I can," replied the girl, with a wan smile.

The nurse drew a little, spider-legged stand, of inlaid mother-of-pearl, to the side of the invalid's chair, and set the waiter upon it, saying:

"Now, dear, try a little of the port. It will give you an appetite."

"Thank you, Mrs. Nolliss. Will you please to touch the bell for me?"

The matron complied, and a fresh-looking young girl in a pretty calico dress, with white apron, and cap trimmed with blue ribbons, entered the room, courtesied and said:

"If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Trimmer have gone to the village on your message, which she left word I was to—to take the liberty to answer her bell, which I am sure I beg your pardon for making so bold, ma'am," with another courtesy.

Antoinette smiled, and murmured to Net:

"She comes from the estate, and is as verdant as its own herbage in spring time; but she is good, and she is your maid."

Then turning to the girl, she said:

"Quite right, Cally. It was you I wanted, not Trimmer. This lady is the mistress you are to serve."

The girl turned and dropped a courtesy to Mrs. Fleming.

"Now show your mistress to her room, and wait her orders there. Net, dear," the young lady continued, turning to her guest, "I hope you will make yourself at home; order everything you require, and be as comfortable as if I were up and about and able to see to you myself."

Net stooped and kissed her cousin, and then hurried from the room, and was conducted by the little maid to

the apartments prepared for her, and consisting of sitting room, bed chamber and dressing closet *en suite,* and all upholstered in blue.

Net had no sooner reached the first of these than she turned to the little maid and said:

"You may go now. I do not need anything at present. When I do I will call you."

The girl courtesied and withdrew.

Net locked the door, threw off her hat and shawl, and cast herself headlong down upon the sofa and gave vent to the storm of tears and sobs whose repression had nearly suffocated her.

She wept and sobbed long and hard before the paroxysm of passionate grief had exhausted itself. And after that she still lay upon the sofa, panting and gasping in the subsidence of the tempest.

There was one drop of comfort in her grief for Antoinette. It was in the recollection of her own firmness in resisting all the arguments and persuasion of her stepfather and his lawyers, that might have led to the assertion and establishment of her own claim to Deloraine Park at the expense of her innocent cousin—Antoinette's disinheritance and disgrace.

Ah! what a consolation it was to her at this hour to reflect that by her own forbearance Antoinette had lived, and would die, the undisputed inheritrix of her father's illustrious old name and her father's grand old manor!

After more than an hour Net arose and went into her dressing closet to wash and bathe her face, and to change her dress for the lunch or dinner, whichever might be the rule of the family in the middle of the day.

When she had done all this, and stood up in her neat black silk dress, trimmed with black crape, and with throat and wrist ruffles of white crape lisse, and put a white rose in her dark hair, luncheon was announced.

Net dispatched her dainty luncheon with very little appetite, and was just rising from the table when she was accosted by the nurse, who stood within the open door and said:

"She insists on seeing you, Mrs. Fleming. I begged her to rest, but she will not, and opposition excites her and hurts her more than even giving her her own way and

letting her talk could. We have a hard time with our patient, me and the doctor do."

"I will go to my cousin at once, and I will not let her excite herself by too much conversation," said Net, passing out into the hall.

"Oh, won't you, ma'am?" inquired the nurse, with an incredulous smile, as she led the way.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

### ANTOINETTE'S REPARATION

Lo! the pale lips unclose!
List! list! what sounds are those,
  Plaintive and low?
Art thou mine enemy?
Stoop down and look at me
  Ere hence I go!

Art thou my foeman, now?
Look on my pallid brow,
  Whose seal is set!
Pardoning, *I* pass away;
Wage *thou* no war with clay—
  Pardon! forget!

CAROLINE B. SOUTHEY.

"HERE is Mrs. Fleming, my dear! Now *do* be good to yourself and get—keep quiet as you can!" said Mrs. Nolliss opening the door of the boudoir to admit Net, and then retiring and closing it upon her.

"Dear Net, I hope you have had a good nap and a good rest since I saw you last," said Antoinette, from her invalid chair, where she sat just as Net had left her.

"I have not been asleep, dear. I never could sleep in the day time; but I shall make up for my failure to-night," said Net, cheerfully.

"Sit down here, love—no! not on that cushion at my feet! I won't have it so!" exclaimed Antoinette, seeing

that her cousin was about to resume that humble position she had occupied on her first arrival.

"But I *prefer* this low seat—not in mock humility, but in affection and for comfort and convenience," smiled Net. "I can sit here and bask in the direct rays of the coal fire, and I can nestle close to you, and hold your hands and look into your face! Do let me stay!"

"Have your own way, Net. You always managed to get it! And now—tell me the truth of that terrible report that has reached me through the newspapers. Tell me all about it. This is a good time to do it, for Nurse Nolliss says I must not talk much; but she has not forbidden me to listen. Tell me the truth, Net!" said Antoinette, settling herself in an easy attitude.

"You—mean—about—that——" began Net, slowly and tremblingly.

"Murder in the railway carriage, of poor Kit Ken! Yes, you know what I mean! And Valdimir Desparde accused of it!"

"But, dear Antoinette, is not this subject too exciting for you?" pleaded Net, in alarm for her cousin.

"It is very exciting," confessed the sick girl.

"Then had we not better avoid it?"

"Not at all! for the excitement is *within,* and the only way of quieting it is to quiet my doubts! Poor Kit Ken murdered and Valdimir Desparde accused! I did not even know that he had returned. But he never could have been guilty of such a crime?"

"Of course he could not."

"Tell me the whole story."

"I will if you will lie back quietly and rest and listen, and not attempt to talk more than is absolutely necessary."

Antoinette smiled and silently complied.

Net told the whole story from beginning to end.

Antoinette only interrupted her by occasional exclamations.

But when she had quite finished, the sick girl's tongue was loosened again.

"What an unscrupulous villain Brandon Coyle must have been! I never did like him," she said.

"Nor I," assented Net.

"And he decoyed poor Kit into a false marriage?"

"False, or otherwise, I do not know. If the house where the marriage took place was across the border, it was a true marriage, though a peasant had performed the ceremony; but if it was on this side it was most probably a false marriage," said Net.

"And you, *you* discovered the culprit in your own house and made him promise to own his marriage to Kit, under penalty of exposure to the old squire?"

"Yes, and he promised as I told you."

"And at that very time he was engaged to Lady Arielle Montjoie?"

"Certainly. And now I have told you quite enough. Lie down and rest, dear, for I am going to leave you," said Net, kissing her cousin affectionately.

After leaving Antoinette, Net repaired to her room.

She rang for her little maid and ordered a cup of tea and lights to be brought to her bedroom.

Then she undressed and put on a wrapper, and sat down to wait.

Cally soon appeared with wax lights, tea and dry toast on a little waiter.

Net drank the tea, and then dismissed her maid and retired to bed.

Overpowered by fatigue, she soon forgot all cares and sorrows in a deep and dreamless sleep.

She overslept herself in the morning, for when she awoke the sun was so high and bright that it half lighted her room even by its narrow gleams between the slats of her window shutters and the divisions of her blue satin curtains.

She arose and dressed without the assistance of her maid, and went out into the hall.

There she saw Trimmer, Miss Deloraine's maid, sitting before her mistress's room door.

"How is Miss Deloraine this morning?" inquired Net.

"Better again, ma'am, and wearying to see you like a nursling for its mother," replied the woman.

"You should have called me."

"She would not let us, ma'am. She said you were tired with riding day and night, and you must be allowed to sleep if you slept all day."

"I will go to her now."

"Nay, ma'am; she said you were to have your breakfast first, and it is quite ready."

"Then I will get it over as soon as possible. Please give my love to your mistress, and tell her that I am up, and will be with her in ten minutes," said Net, as she hurried down the hall and opened the door on the opposite side that led into the little breakfast room.

There she found a bright sea-coal fire burning, and a neat, little breakfast table.

There was no one in the room, so she rang the bell.

The summons was answered by the young footman, Hart, who entered with a large silver waiter, on which were arranged coffee, cream, muffins, eggs, toast and breakfast bacon.

He placed all these on the table, set his waiter against the little sideboard and stood in attendance.

Net dispatched her breakfast with more regard to haste than health, and then hurried to the room of her cousin.

She found Antoinette prettily dressed in a white velvet wrapper, lined and faced with quilted blue satin, and with her beautiful raven black hair neatly arranged.

"The ruling passion strong in death," thought Net.

"Come and sit by me, my darling Net."

Net complied.

"Net, dear, before I depart I must make reparation for the one great evil I have done in my life," said Antoinette, humbly.

"You, my gentle dear? You do evil? I cannot think it," said Net, repressing her tears.

"Well, you will learn. Net, I *wish* you had brought the children with you!" she suddenly exclaimed.

"My love, it was to spare them the exposure and you the disturbance that I left them."

"Yes, I know, and you were right; but it is of the children I wish to speak first. It is for their sake I must speak of mundane matters, when I would rather forget them."

"Do not talk of anything that will trouble you, dear," said Net.

"But I must. Now listen. You know Deloraine Park has a rent roll of forty thousand pounds a year?"

"No, I did not know."

"Well, it has; and you are its sole heiress. You will be very wealthy, Net."

"Oh, my dear! Oh, my dear!" moaned Net, in irrepressible sorrow.

"Are you sighing for me, Net? Do not so! I am satisfied and happy. I am going to a mansion in my Father's house, compared to which all the architectural grandeur and landscape glory of this world are but as subterranean caverns and coal pits. Ah! Net, I overheard my nurse lamenting because my poor mother should have married and brought forth a daughter to die in her youth of an inherited disease. But, Net, I think it was quite worth while to be born, even to a short, fragile life in this world, for the sake of living eternally in the world beyond. But to return to the children. Deloraine Park will be yours—it is entailed. I could not will it away, even if I were of age and desired to do so. But, Net, I have other property, in my own right, which, if I were of age, I should give and bequeath to those orphan children, Luke and Ella Starr. But you know I cannot make a will, being a minor. I can only express my wishes. You, being my nearest of kin, Net, will inherit *all* my real and personal property, entailed or otherwise. Now, Net, you will be rich enough, in all conscience, from the revenues of Deloraine Park, to be able to dispense with the other property, which I wish you to give to the children, share and share alike, if you *can* do so, for I am not sure that you can."

"I will carry out all your kind and loving wishes to the very best of my ability," answered Net.

"And now, dear girl, I must speak to you of yet another subject—a painful one, I fear, to you. Will you pardon me if I mention it?"

"Talk of anything you please, dear Antoinette."

"Well, then—of Adrian Fleming. Do you ever hear from him?"

"Never," answered Net, growing pale.

"Nor *of* him?"

"No."

"Do you ever hear from Sir Adrian?"

"No."

"How strange! And Adrian used to love you."

"He used to think he did," sighed Net.

"And the baronet had a great esteem and affection for you."

"He seemed to have, but he would not receive me at Fleming Chase unless I would consent to part with the babies and send them to an orphan asylum."

"Ah, yes, I remember! You decided *not* to do so."

"Yes."

"And that ended all communication between you and the family at Fleming Chase?"

"Yes, as a matter of course."

"And where has Adrian been all this time?"

"Traveling, as I understand."

"And what do the people of Miston say to this state of affairs between a newly-married couple?

"I do not quite know. I think they have the impression that we were married on the eve of Mr. Fleming's departure on his foreign travel, merely to bind us irrevocably to each other during his absence, and against the time when he should come home and claim his wife."

"And I believe they are nearer the truth than you think."

"What do you mean, dear Antoinette?" inquired her hearer, in growing agitation.

"My darling, I told you some minutes since that I had to make reparation for the one great evil I had done. Net! it was for *this* reason, as well as for the love I bear you and the desire I felt to see you that I summoned you here."

"Oh, Antoinette, dearest, I—do not know what you mean."

"No, of course you have not the remotest idea! Nor will you have even when I tell you that I have called *another* person to my death-bed."

"Whom? Whom?" breathed Net, in an almost expiring voice, for her prophetic soul divined the truth.

"Adrian Fleming."

"Adrian Fleming! Is he in England?"

"Yes, I wrote to his father, the baronet, inquiring for his address, for I wished to write to him. The baronet answered that he was then at Fleming Chase. I received this answer at the same hour that I received the telegram announcing your visit, Net. And then I took a resolution. I wrote to Adrian Fleming, told him my condition, and

begged him to come at once to see me. That was all. This morning, Net, I received a telegram from him, saying that he would arrive at Deloraine Station by the twelve noon train. The carriage has already gone thither to meet him and bring him here."

*"Oh, Heaven of heavens!"* moaned Net, in a low, shuddering tone, for she dreaded even more than she desired to see the husband who had cast her off within a few hours after their marriage.

"Now do not be distressed, Net. The man loves you, I know he loves you, and is only too glad of an opportunity to see you and make his peace."

"Does he know that I am here?" breathed Net.

"No, I did not tell him in my letter."

"Then I need not see him at all! I would not force myself upon him, Antoinette!"

"My dear, you will have to see him in my presence. I have a reparation to make to both, which must be made in the presence of both. But you will not therefore force yourself upon him. Nay! Let him *woo* again the wife he discarded, if he wants her love, which I feel sure that he does."

At this moment the door opened and the footman Hart appeared and announced—

"Mr. Adrian Fleming has arrived, ma'am."

"Show him up to this room," replied Antoinette.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE MEETING

They seemed to those who saw them meet
  The careless friends of every day;
Her smile was still serene and sweet,
  His courtesy was free and gay;
Yet if by one the other's name
  In some unguarded hour was heard,
The heart you deemed so cold and tame
  Would shiver like a captured bird.

MONCTON MILNES.

"MR. ADRIAN FLEMING" was announced, and Mr Adrian Fleming entered the boudoir.

He had thrown off his ulster and cap in the hall, and now came in, in his neatly-fitting morning suit of dark-gray broadcloth, and looking even handsomer in his perfect blonde beauty, more elegant and aristocratic, than he had ever seemed before.

Net had shrunk within the rose-colored and lace curtains of the bay window, beside Antoinette's luxurious lounging chair.

Adrian did not see her, therefore, but advanced directly to Antoinette, with his small, neatly-gloved hand held out, and his fair, radiant face clouding over as he perceived the fearful change that had passed upon the once beautiful and blooming girl—beautiful she was now, with a spiritual beauty developed by trial, but no longer blooming, no longer attractive to a young man like Fleming in the hey-day of his own youth and vanity.

"I am very sorry to see you looking so ill," he said, with much feeling, but with no tact at all.

"Yes, I must give you a little shock, but you will get over it in a few seconds," said Antoinette, calmly. Then holding out her hand, she added: "I am glad to see you, Mr. Fleming, and grateful for your quick personal response to my letter; but you will pardon my not rising."

"Oh, do not take the least trouble, I beg of you, Miss Deloraine; I will find a seat," he answered, looking around, and laying hold of a small silver-gilt and rose-satin chair.

"But you must find something else, or rather somebody else first," said Antoinette, looking around to see what had become of her friend.

Adrian's glance naturally followed hers, and fell upon the form of Net standing within the rosy curtains of the bay window and his fair face flushed up to his forehead.

"Net, my dear, will you come and speak to Adrian?" inquired Antoinette.

Net came out, her pretty face suffused with a soft blush, and her voice slightly tremulous with emotion, as she greeted her recreant lover and bridegroom with the words her own self-respect compelled her to utter.

"I did not know that you were expected here, Mr. Fleming, until five minutes ago."

"Or you would not have been here yourself, I am to infer?" he answered, in a tone no less agitated than her own.

"I should not," she assented.

"Come, dear friends, do not quarrel, or if you do—why, quarrel with me, not with each other. I am the only one in fault now, and the only one who has been in fault from the beginning to the end. Give me my elixir, Net," said Antoinette, faintly.

Her friend filled a small wine glass with some rich and spicy cordial from a cut-glass bottle that stood on the table and brought it to the sick girl.

She drank it, returned the glass, and said:

"Thank you, dear; now resume your seat. Adrian, take yours. I have something to tell you both which jointly concerns me and yourselves; therefore I have brought you to my presence together. I hope you will forgive me this also, if you think I have done wrong."

Net raised her cousin's hand and pressed it to her lips for all answer.

"Pray do not pain yourself or friends by speaking in this way, Miss Deloraine," pleaded Mr. Fleming with some emotion.

"I called *you* 'Adrian,' " said the girl, with a sad smile.

"Thanks, dear Antoinette," amended the young man.

"Well, I have brought you both to my side to make an explanation—ah!—*'a last dying speech and confession,'*

the poor, condemned felons call it, don't you know? Can either of you guess the nature of *my* confession? Ah, I see that you can!" sighed the failing girl, sinking back in her chair.

"Dear Antoinette, do not overtalk yourself. Indeed it is not necessary," pleaded Net, as she took a flask of aromatic ammonia and saturated a fresh handkerchief with it and gave it to her friend.

"You guess all about it without my telling you! No doubt you guess about my fault, but you cannot guess the motives that led to it! Can you, now?" inquired the girl, as she inhaled the reviving aroma from her saturated handkerchief.

Net shook her head.

"What do you say, Adrian?" inquired the sick girl.

"Nothing, Antoinette. I do not know, unless it was some passing pique against me," replied the young man.

"It was nothing of the sort! No malice, no selfishness of any sort entered into my act, evil as it was in itself."

"I am sure of that, dearest," said Net, in a low voice, as she pressed the hand of her friend, which she continued to hold.

"And I beg your pardon for my own hastily given opinion, dear Antoinette," added the young man.

While these two spoke and answered Antoinette on the same subject, in the same conversation, they never looked at or addressed each other.

In fact, they were as far apart as the nature of the interview would permit.

Net sat on a low hassock beside Antoinette's chair, and held her hand.

Adrian sat several feet off, with his hand idly playing with the trifles on the stand beside him.

"But you both now see the necessity of a last confession to vindicate my motives," said the sick girl.

"It was I, of course, who changed the notes in their envelopes, placing the one written to me under Net's address, and the one written to her in mine. It was I who completely deceived Net into the belief that you had written to propose this marriage to her, which, indeed, all that had gone before might have led her to expect you to do. Ah, Adrian, dear, I knew that at last!"

At these words the face of the young man crimsoned to the tips of his ears, and he snapped in two pieces a fragile little paper cutter with which he had been playing.

Net heaved a sigh of relief. She *was* pleased that Adrian should hear from Antoinette's own lips how entirely she had been misled to believe that the fatal proposal of marriage had been meant for her, so that neither now nor ever could a doubt on the subject arise in his mind.

"Adrian, I should never have known the prior claim that Net had on your attention if it had not been for Kit—poor Kit Ken, who, with her outspoken truth, opened my eyes. I came to the Miston rectory, a young girl, just let loose from the strict discipline of a French boarding school, full of vivacity and vanity—*myself*, I mean, not the boarding school, at all, at all. I found a young man at the rectory as handsome, as vivacious, and as vain as—myself! Don't wince, Adrian, dear. You know it is the truth I am telling."

The young man bit his lips and broke a book mark between his finger and thumb and threw away the fragments.

Antoinette continued:

"Naturally we two peacocks admired each other, and desired each other's admiration, and set out to get it, and—did get it. We carried on a mutual admiration firm with distinguished success; but as to love, my dear Adrian, up to that time you had never loved anybody but yourself, and I—had never even loved myself! But I enjoyed admiration, devotion, homage, and never guessed the wrong I was doing to Net until poor Kit Ken burst forth upon me one day in a torrent of indignation, charging me with having broken Mistress Net's heart, through taking away her 'young man.'"

Now it was Net's turn to blush up to the edges of her fine black hair, and to squeeze her cousin's fingers until she winced.

"Kit's story was a perfect revelation, a complete eye-opener. I believed it on the spot. I felt it to be truth. And from that moment I resolved to stop the play, and I *did* stop it. I began to treat you with a coldness that utterly puzzled you. And to retaliate on me, *you* began to resume your attentions to Net—with the amiable motive

of piquing my jealousy. Why, my dear, you were doing just exactly what I wished and intended you to do."

Adrian Fleming blushed until his brow was crimson, bit his lip until it bled, and unconsciously picked all the plumage off a stuffed humming bird that hovered over a basket of wax flowers.

Net, seeing all this destruction going on, and not knowing where it would end, slipped quietly up to the stand, took off everything that could be injured and placed them on a distant table, and replaced them with a vase of paper tapers, with which the restless fingers could play the mischief without much loss.

All this Net did, and then resumed her seat, without having been noticed by Adrian, so gentle were her motions and so deep was his absorption in the subject of Antoinette's discourse.

"And thus you see, Adrian," continued the sick girl, "how natural it was for Net and for everyone else to believe that you had returned to your true allegiance. Affairs went on in this way for a while, until you grew impatient, found out your ruse did not answer your purpose, and tried to resume your friendly relations with me; and when you found you could not do so, you thought me still angry with you, and you wrote that proposal of marriage which you inclosed to me, together with an off-hand sort of note to Net, which you desired me, in a postscript written on a separate piece of paper, to read so that I might know there could be no question of marriage between you and Net. I saw that these two notes could be transposed with perfect success so that Net should receive the proposal of marriage, that your conduct had given *her*, as well as all her friends, every reason to expect."

Here Adrian Fleming began, unconsciously, demolishing the sheaf of paper matches, while Net studied the windings of the rose vine over the white ground of the carpet at her feet; and Antoinette, after inhaling aromatic ammonia, continued her confession:

"When I resolved to entrap you, by your own letter, into doing justice to Net, I was not impelled by any malice or any other sort of selfishness. I was rather impelled by a spirit of mischief, fun, practical joking, and also by a wish that justice might be done to Net, whom I felt that I had

wronged, and led *you* to wrong, and whom, therefore, I wished to *right* and compel you to right. My judgment was at fault, I know—very much at fault. I wronged Net by this last attempt to right her more bitterly than I had ever wronged her, or any other human being, before. I know this now, and I knew it within one hour after it was too late to retrace my steps—to undo my work! I never spent such an unhappy night in all my life as the night on which dear Net—deceived by the proposal of marriage that had been made to me, but which I placed in the envelope you had directed to her—went off to Scotland to be married to you! Pity, terror and remorse harassed me by turns. I hoped that the plot would be discovered before the marriage could be celebrated, but that hope failed when you both returned—married!"

"And you did not confess?" murmured Adrian, almost involuntarily.

*"I dared not!* I was in mortal fear of Dr. Starr! Besides, I saw confession would do no good. I allowed you to believe that *you* yourself had, in your haste, misdirected the notes. I did not *tell* you so, in so many words, but I *did* suggest the possibility of your having made such a mistake, and you caught at it and believed it! Ah! my conscience would not permit me to tell a literal lie, but allowed me to forget that falsehood is falsehood, whether it be spoken in plain words, or hinted by suggestions or by silence! Well, this is all I have to tell you, dear friends; and now I have only to beg your pardon for the wrong I did you both, and to hope that the Divine Providence will 'shape our ends, rough hew them how we may.' "

Antoinette stopped and sank back in her chair, much exhausted by the long-continued effort in conversation.

Adrian Fleming arose and took Antoinette's limp hand and raised it to his lips in silence; then he paused before Net who was still seated on the low cushion beside her invalid cousin's chair, and said:

"I have to ask your forgiveness for some misapprehensions, that I now set right."

Net bowed in silence. She could not speak.

The nurse came in, uncalled, and said:

"My dear Miss Deloraine, I have been waiting for your

bell this half hour. It is time for you to have your tonic and lie down."

"Yes, it is; you may bring it to me," replied the poor girl, faintly and vaguely; and then turning to her cousin she said: "That bell we heard a few minutes ago was for lunch, dear. You know the way to the little rear breakfast room where it is served. Will you show Mr. Fleming?"

Net arose, pressed her lips to the pallid brow of her cousin, and with a slight bow to Adrian, led the way into the hall.

There he offered her his arm.

She declined the courtesy with a gentle gesture and walked on.

Adrian Fleming frowned slightly and followed.

A very dainty and tempting repast was elegantly served.

They sat down opposite to each other at the little round table, and Hart served them from a little sideboard.

Each of these young beings looked more attractive in the other's eyes than ever before.

Both had grown handsomer in the few months of their separation.

And now some little excitement of pride or pique had added color to their cheeks and sparkle to their eyes.

Net owed nothing whatever to dress for *her* beauty. Nothing could be plainer than the lusterless black silk, trimmed with black crape, that she still wore as mourning for her beloved stepfather, and this was unrelieved by any ornament except the narrow white crape lisse frilling around her throat and wrists; and yet she looked beautiful with her rippling, jet black hair, delicate features, dark gray eyes, and brilliant complexion.

When the light meal was about half over, and the young footman was standing at some little distance doing something at the sideboard, Adrian bent across the table to Net and said:

"Do you not think that we might dispense with the attendance of that servant?"

"No, by no means. He must remain here," answered Net, gravely and politely.

Adrian Fleming shrugged his shoulders and relapsed into silence, which continued to the end of the meal.

When it was over they both left the table together.

"Where are you going?" inquired Fleming, when they were out in the hall.

"To the drawing room first. This is the hour at which Antoinette takes her nap and cannot be disturbed," said Net.

"I understand that. Will you take my arm?"

"I thank you, no; we dispense with formalities in this house for the present," replied Net, as she walked on in advance.

"You dispense with formalities when you please to do so. You did not please to dispense with the formality of the servant's attendance during the whole of lunch," remarked Fleming, in an aggrieved tone.

"Ah, but that was another thing," said Net, as she swayed open the door of the drawing room and entered.

"Here," said Net, going up to one of the many well-laden little tables, "here are 'Leach's Pictures of English Life,' from *Punch*. Here are also 'Doré's Illustrations of Tennyson's Idyls of King Arthur,' and many other amusing works. Pray entertain yourself and excuse me. I have letters to write."

She turned to leave the room but he called her back.

"Net!"

"Well?" she responded gently.

"Why do you go and leave me?"

"I have letters to write, really, and the only time I have to write them is while Antoinette sleeps."

"Can they not wait?" he inquired.

"No, indeed they cannot. They should have been written before this. I left Castle Montjoie day before yesterday, reached here yesterday morning, spent nearly the whole day in Antoinette's room, and went to rest early, because I was so very tired. This morning, as soon as I had breakfast, I had to go to Antoinette, and I stayed with her until your arrival. Now I *must* excuse myself and write letters to Lady Arielle Montjoie and to Miss Desparde," said Net, taking the trouble to explain herself at large, while she stood with her hand on the knob of the door.

"Net," he said, looking intently at her, "I shall have to leave here in two hours, in order to catch the six o'clock train."

"Shall you?" said Net, calmly. "Then perhaps you

had better bid me good-by now, as we may not meet again before you go."

He looked at her half fondly, half resentfully. How beautiful she was in her fresh, young womanhood! Surely never so beautiful as now!

"Net," he said, reproachfully, yet affectionately, "is it possible that you have forgotten the relations that exist between us?"

"I do not know that I really understand them, Mr. Fleming," she answered, gently and gravely.

"Do you not understand that I am your husband and that I have some right to your society?" he inquired, with a slight accent of anger in his tone.

"You told me once that the marriage ceremony, certainly performed under a great misapprehension on your part, was good for nothing."

"And you believed it?"

"I neither believed nor disbelieved. I thought that you might be mistaken in that, as you had been in other matters! But you did tell me the ceremony was invalid," said the girl, quietly.

"Yet you took my name, and kept it."

"Say, rather, that Sir Adrian Fleming and Dr. Starr both assured me that my marriage was perfectly valid, and forced the name upon me. I did not take your name willingly, Mr. Fleming—after what you had said to me—any more than I would have come here willingly if I had known that you were to be a visitor at the house," said the girl, still very gently.

"Net," he eagerly exclaimed, "would you believe me if I were to tell you now that though that mistake was a dreadful disappointment to me at the time, yet *now* I am grateful that it was *you* who stood by my side and was married to me, and that it was *not* your cousin? Would you believe that my heart would have so changed, Net?"

"Yes, Mr. Fleming; for I believe you to be truthful, and I *know* you to be changeable," said Net, with a slight smile.

He made a gesture of impatience, but then controlled himself, and said:

"Net, I am *not* changeable in the depths of my soul. It was *you,* and you only, that I loved from first to last.

My fancy for poor Antoinette Deloraine was but a hallucination of the eyes."

Net looked at him gravely, and a little sadly, and quoted some long-passed words of his:

" 'Miss Deloraine, it is you, and you only, whom I ardently adore. My affection for poor little Net Starr was but a sentiment of compassion for the good, little, overtasked creature.' "

Adrian Fleming blushed scarlet to the edges of his fair hair as he stammered:

"You—you overheard me speak those words! You were capable of eavesdropping, then?"

"No, indeed; I never heard you 'speak those words.' The quotation is altogether hypothetical. I only fancied that you were likely to have said just such words to Antoinette," said the girl, with a smile in her eyes.

Adrian Fleming made a gesture of desperation and disgust. He knew that he had committed himself.

"Come, come, Net," he said, after a few moments of silence. "We *are,* really and truly, legally and validly married. Let us forgive and forget. Dear Net, I swear by all my hopes of heaven it *was* you, and *only* you, whom I truly loved from first to last!"

"Oh, I dare say you think so *now,* Mr. Fleming, and I am quite ready to forgive and forget, but not by any means ready to take your word for all your future states. You had better take time to be sure of your own mind, Mr. Fleming, before you ask me to make up mine. And now I must really bid you good-by, for my letters must be written before mail time, and you will have probably departed before I get through. Good-by."

And with the same unruffled gentleness, Net bowed and left the room.

Adrian Fleming stood where she had left him, looking after her as long as she was in sight.

Then he began to walk up and down the floor with very unequal strides, asking himself:

"Can this be Net? This be the gentle, patient little Grizzelle whose very gentleness and patience I once half despised as weakness and poorness of spirit? What a beauty she has grown to be! But she is changed in more things than one. I wonder if she has ceased to care for

me?" he asked himself, as he went up to a pier-glass and contemplated his superb beauty in its reflection there.

"Ah, bah! of course she has not. She is only putting on this civil indifference—this gentle carelessness. And I deserve it all, I suppose. Well—one thing is certain: if I wish to win Net again I shall have to woo her again. And I will not go back until I have done it. I will send to the station and telegraph the governor not to expect me until he hears from me again," concluded Mr. Fleming, as he gave the bell cord a pull that suddenly brought Hart into the room.

"Pen, ink, and paper," was Fleming's brief order.

"Yes, sir. Please, sir, will you permit me to show you into the library, where you will find every convenience of the sort," said the boy, with a bow.

"Very well; lead the way."

The footman showed the guest into the handsome library, placed a chair at one of the writing tables, and drew out a drawer filled with stationery.

"Now go and ask the butler if he can dispatch a servant on horseback to take a message to the telegraph offic at the station. And do you come here to take it down."

The boy bowed and left the room.

The young gentleman wrote the following telegram:

"MR. ADRIAN FLEMING, *from Deloraine Park, to* SIR ADRIAN FLEMING, *at Fleming Chase, Flemington, Dorset:* Miss Deloraine is very ill, and not expected to live. Her cousin, my wife, is staying with her. The latter, you know, is heiress presumptive of Deloraine Park. Do not expect me home at present. Will write or telegraph before I return."

He sealed this up in an envelope, with a sovereign, and gave it to Hart, who punctually reappeared to take it to the groom who was to convey it to the telegraph agent at the station.

Having dispatched this business Adrian Fleming stretched himself on a sofa to take a nap while waiting for Antoinette to awake or Net to reappear.

## CHAPTER XXX

### A LOVE CHASE

He must be worthy of her love,
  For not the faintest shade
Of all the charms that round her move
  Within his heart can fade.
The glances of her gentle eyes
  Are in his soul enshrined;
Her radiant smiles, her tender sighs,
  Are treasured in his mind.

MIRAVAL.

IN THE meantime Net had gone to her room; but she was too deeply disturbed to sit down at once to her letter writing.

While in the presence of Mr. Adrian Fleming her self-respect had constrained her to the exercise of a severe self-control; but as soon as she reached the privacy of her own chamber her over-strained nerves gave way, and she sank trembling into her easy chair, where she sat some time before she could recover her calmness.

Then she drew the little writing table up before her, and commenced a letter to Lady Arielle Montjoie, to give the latter an account of her journey and of all that had happened since her arrival at Deloraine Park.

While Net was so engaged, the sick girl, in her luxurious boudoir, slept on her lounge, under the influence of an opiate.

Antoinette did not wake until four o'clock in the afternoon. She found the nurse sitting by her side, for in the present condition of her health Miss Deloraine was never left alone for a moment, sleeping or waking.

"Nurse, if you will be my maid for once and dress me for the afternoon, I will rise and sit up for a while," said Miss Deloraine.

The woman smilingly nodded assent to her request.

While these things were going on in other parts of the vast house, Adrian Fleming was comfortably sleeping the deep sleep of fatigue on the sofa in the library.

The profound quiet of the place favored his long and unbroken repose, so he slumbered on until five o'clock, when he was aroused by the ringing of the first dinner, or dressing bell.

"And where the deuce am I to dress?" he inquired, as he sat up, rubbed his eyes, and stared at the ebony clock on the mantel shelf, where the hands pointed at a few minutes after five.

He rang the bell and Hart promptly appeared.

"If you please, sir, the telegram went off all right, and here's the agent's receipt or somethink," said the boy, delivering a sealed envelope.

It was not any receipt, however, where none was needed. It was only the change for the sovereign that had been sent to pay for the telegram.

"Can you show me into a dressing room where I may wash my hands?" inquired the young gentleman, in an irritated tone, for he was impatient under a sense of having been neglected.

"If you please, sir, I have my mistress's orders to show you to your own suite of apartments, sir, and that's the first dinner bell, if you please, and your porkmangle have been carried up," replied Hart, pointing to his red head.

"Very well, then. Carry yourself up, and I will follow."

And Hart indexed his red hair again and conducted the guest to an elegant suite of rooms, very much like the other suites except in color.

These were upholstered in sea-green.

The same sounding bell that roused Adrian Fleming from his nap startled Net at her letter writing. She settled herself again, however, and did not leave her writing table until she had sealed and superscribed her last letter.

Then she arose and looked at her watch and found that she had ten minutes to arrange her toilet for dinner.

She glanced at the mirror and saw that her neat dress of rich, lusterless black silk, with delicate white crape frills at the throat and wrists, needed very little attention indeed.

So she only washed her hands, shook out the folds of her skirt, took a white calla lily from its glass on the table and placed it in the dark braids of her hair, caught up a

fresh pocket handkerchief and went out to the dining room just as the second bell sounded.

To her surprise, she met Adrian Fleming on the threshold.

"You missed your train, then?" she said, with all the composure of outward manner that she could command.

"I did not try to catch my train," he answered with a mischievous smile; then he added gravely: "No, Net, I did not leave the house; nor will I leave it for the present. We must not part again with a misunderstanding between us."

Net thought that the misunderstanding had been none of her making or seeking; but she said nothing, only passed into the dining room and took her seat at the table.

He followed her example.

The butler and the footman were both in attendance—the butler waiting, it is to be presumed, in honor of the new guest.

There could be no confidential conversation in the presence of these two.

Fleming touched upon the subject which was at that time the most frequent topic of discussion in every drawing room, parlor, club and dinner table in England—the mysterious murder in the railway carriage, and the impending trial of Mr. Valdimir Desparde.

"I saw him in New York just before he sailed. I had intended to remain longer abroad, but after having spent a couple of days with Desparde, and then parted with him after seeing him off to Liverpool, I was seized with a sudden and severe fit of homesickness and I quickly made up my mind, packed my traps, and followed by the next steamer. I reached England only three days after he had landed; and you may judge my consternation when, on picking up the London *Times* of that morning, I saw the account of his apprehension on the charge of having murdered that poor, witless creature, Kit Ken," said Adrian.

"Of course, you never believed it," said Net, not as a question, but as a positive affirmation.

"Believed it? No! I read the whole account, and came to the conclusion that it was—another man whom I had positively known to be on intimate terms with the beautiful idiot."

"I know the man to whom you refer, and I have more reason that you can have for believing him—nay, for *knowing* him to be the guilty party. But, unhappily, our mental convictions are not legal evidence, and we cannot get hold of the man, at least, we *had* not up to the time of my coming here; and, indeed, *nothing* but the extreme illness of Antoinette could have drawn me away from Arielle and Vivienne at such a time."

"When does his trial come on?"

"On next Monday the assizes open at Yockley, and his case is the first on the docket. Only three days, you see, and no important evidence for the defense yet. We have been seeking through both public and private means to find Valdimir's fellow-travelers from Southampton to prove an *alibi,* but hitherto without success; for, you see, they were passengers for short stages, and though Valdimir exchanged observations with several of them, he neither knew their names nor did they know his, which makes our seeking almost impossible of success."

"Unless an *alibi* can be proved it will be likely to go hard with him," said Adrian.

Net shuddered, but did not reply.

Soon after the dessert was set on the table Net withdrew from the room, leaving Mr. Fleming to his wine.

Adrian was very temperate. He took a single glass of light Rhine wine, and arose and joined Net in the drawing room.

"At last," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction, "I have the opportunity of speaking to you without the gaping eyes and ears of servants."

"Do eyes and ears gape?" inquired Net, gravely.

"Do not mock me. I love you, Net! I love you!" he said, seizing her hand.

She did not withdraw it. She neither repulsed nor responded to his advance. She stood before him, to all appearance, quiet and indifferent.

"I love you, Net! Why don't you say something? I love you!"

"So you have told me—and others—many times!" smiled the girl.

"Ah! you do not believe me!" he said, with an aggrieved air, "Net, you do not believe!"

"Oh, yes I do! I believe that you love me, just at this moment, or rather I believe that you *think* you love me, just at this moment," said Net, not smilingly this time, but very gravely.

"Ah, what do you mean by 'just at this moment'? Do you not know that I shall love you always, for all time?" he inquired, in a voice full of pain.

Net was silent.

"Say, do you not?" he persisted.

"No, Adrian, I do not. I cannot!" she answered, truthfully and sorrowfully.

"Net! Net! how shall I ever win your confidence again?" he cried, in a despairing voice.

The girl looked at him in mute distress. She could not flatter him by any fair untruths.

"How?" he asked. "How, Net?"

"I do not know," she sighed.

"You will let me try, Net? You will let me try to win your love?"

"You *have* my love; you have had my love through all," she hastened to say, in a low, tremulous voice, but as if she were glad to be able to say it.

"Bless you for those words, Net! And your *trust!* You will let me try to win your trust too?"

"Yes," murmured the girl.

At this moment, they were interrupted by the entrance of Hart, who touched his red locks and said:

"If you please, ma'am and sir, my mistress's compliments and she would be glad to see you in her room, *now,* if you please."

"We will attend her. Come, Adrian," said Net, leading the way to Antoinette's boudoir.

They found the invalid wrapped in a warm and beautiful dressing gown of white velvet, trimmed with white Astrachan fur, and reclining in her resting chair.

"I sent for you to see you for a little while before I retire, for I do not feel equal to sitting up long to-night," she said, as she smilingly extended a hand to each.

They pressed those pale hands to their lips and then took seats on each side of her.

She looked from one face to the other to read the answer

to the question she dared not ask—whether they had become reconciled to each other.

She read there that they were tending towards a reunion, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

The two visitors had scarcely seated themselves, however, when the postman's knock was heard on the hall door, and it sounded through the silent house as it never sounded before.

"I have no correspondents myself, now that you are here, Net," said the invalid girl with a smile.

The footman entered with a single letter on a silver tray, which he carried to Mrs. Fleming.

"It is from Miston—from Lord Beaudevere. Will you excuse me?" said Net, as she took the letter and examined it.

"Oh, by all means! Read it at once, and let us hear all the news," said Antoinette.

The girl broke the seal, glanced over the letter and then read it aloud for the benefit of her companions:

"CASTLE MONTJOIE—Midnight.

"We have just got home from Yockley, dear Net, and, upon inquiry, find all well, including the most important items—the babies. Of course, I have no news to tell you of our search for defensive evidence. I write now only to inclose a letter that has arrived for you from Chelsea, London. Don't know the locality, and don't know the handwriting, but lose no time in sending it on to you, while I remain your friend and servant, BEAUDEVERE."

"Who is the inclosed letter from, if I may venture to inquire?" demanded Antoinette.

"I—don't—know," slowly replied Net, as she critically examined the superscription.

"Well, then, suppose you open it and see," said Antoinette with a smile.

Net broke the seal and opened the second letter, which, oddly enough, inclosed a third.

Net glanced over the open letter and started; her placid face became agitated, her grave eyes grew joyous, as she gazed at the letter and rapidly traversed its contents.

Her companions watched her in silent surprise and ex-

pectation as she quickly turned over the page and swiftly read to the conclusion.

Then, seizing the third letter, she tore it open and quickly ran through it.

Lastly, dropping it upon her lap, she burst into tears of joy, covered her eyes with her hands and exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven! Oh, thank, thank Heaven!"

"What is it all about, Net, dear?" inquired the invalid girl.

"What does all this mean, my dear Net?" demanded Adrian Fleming in the same instant.

Net dropped her hands and turned her radiant face from one to the other—radiant through her tears as sunbeams through rain—as she answered:

"It means deliverance for Valdimir Desparde! Oh, my dears! It means deliverance!"

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## CHAPTER XXXI

### FROM BEYOND

No seeming evil comes to any
But may be fraught with good to many.

AYAH.

With a defeated joy. SHAKESPEARE.

NET was trembling all over with excitement.

Her two companions gazed on her in expectation.

"This letter was directed to my home in Miston, and forwarded thence to Castle Montjoie. It appears to come from a lodging house keeper with whom our poor Kit lived——"

"News of Kit!" exclaimed Antoinette.

"Ah!" ejaculated Adrian.

Both became deeply attentive.

"Yes, of course, news of poor Kit Ken, which gives the key to the whole mystery of her murder. Listen," said Net, and she read:

"CHURCH LANE, CHELSEA, LONDON,
"December the —, 18—.

"TO MRS. ADRIAN FLEMING—*My Dear Madam:* You will be surprised at receiving a letter from a total stranger, but you will pardon me for taking the liberty to write to you when you know why I am obliged to do it. Though in such a flutter of my spirits, from what I have just found out, as hardly to know which end I am standing on, much less what I am writing about. Excuse me, madam, but I have had a great shock this day, in hearing promiscuous news about her death, for I never take the papers, having no time to read them.

"But if anybody murdered her in that cruel way, which there is no denying that somebody *did,* it was *him* that done it and nobody else, which she had a foreshadowing of some wickedness intended, though not as bad as that, as you will see by her letter, which I put up with this of mine to send to you, according to her own request that same day before she went away from me.

"And, madam, he treated of her scandalous, while she lived with me, and never came to see her above once or twice a week, and despised her and called her a lunatic.

"So she got into her poor head, because he called her so and because he threatened to put her into a lunatic asylum if she did not keep quiet, that he would do so some day, so as to get her out of the way and let him marry some great lady up to the North.

"So that identical day he came to take her away he popped in upon us all of a sudden in the forenoon, and told her to get ready to go with him in the afternoon, and he looked as if he had the—well, madam, you understand what I mean—in him!

"He left to do some business down in the city, and then she began to pack up, gay as a lark, for she thought he was going to take her to his own grand home and acknowledge her as his wife.

"But after she had done her packing her good spirits all of a sudden give way, and it seems she first sat down and wrote that letter to you (which you will find inclosed), and when she had finished it she brings it down to me, and she tells me how she mistrusted him because he had deceived her so many times, and how she feared he was

not agoing to take her to his own home, and that he might be agoing to clap her into a mad house, where she never would be heard of again, and leave her there, while he should go off and marry the great lady he was after.

"I tried to quiet her fears, but she said she could not trust him. And then she gave me this letter, and told me to keep it until I heard from *her;* but if I did not get news of her within ten days I might know that he had clapped her into a mad house or some out-of-the-way prison, and *then* I must post this letter to *you;* she said that you had known her as Christelle Ken and would see her delivered from bondage.

"Ah, madam! her doubts and fears never touched on the terrible truth that she was going to be murdered that same night.

"I promised to do all that she wished, and I put the letter away carefully.

"In the afternoon he came after her, in a cab. I happen to know the number of the cab. It was E 003, and the name of the cabman was Nott. He told me afterwards, the cabman did, that he took them to Paddington Station.

"I kept the letter safe as safe, intending to send it if I did not hear from her in ten days; and to burn it if I did.

"But this morning, madam, something happened which made me change my mind and send it immediate.

"A neighbor came in to bid me good-by before going a journey, and says she:

" 'I travel by the third class. You don't ketch me traveling alone in first or second class after this—no, I will travel in third class, where you can see all the people from one end to t' other of the car and they can all see you. That poor Christelle Ken's death ought to be a warning to us all.'

" 'Christelle Ken!' says I, a thinking of my lodger; 'what about her?'

" 'Eh—don't you know? She as was murdered in the railway carriage last Thursday a week ago!'

" 'Christelle Ken murdered in a railway carriage a week ago?' says I, with the marrow a curdling in my backbone.

" 'Where have you been living, woman,' says she, 'not to have heard of that?'

" 'Tell me all about it,' says I, as soon as I could speak again.

"And she did tell me all that was published in the papers about it; and, moreover, she went to the news agent's at the corner and bought an old *Times* with the full account in it, which I read.

"And, madam, I am sorry to the bottom of my heart for that poor young woman! It is worse than she feared. It is not the mad house, but murder, that has been her fate. And he did it, and nobody else but him; and not that young gent as they took up for it. Let his friends, whoever they be, call me for a witness, and also my servant, Mary Mossop, and likewise Nott, the cabman, No. E 003, who took the party from here to Paddington. I would like to see that guilty man punished, and that poor, simple girl avenged, and wouldn't mind taking a journey up to Yockley myself to see it done, madam. And I remain,

"Yours to serve,

"DEBORAH PERKINS."

"There!" exclaimed Net. "There is the landlady's letter."

"She will be a most important witness for the defense; so will the cabman, Nott. They must both be subpœnaed immediately. What an extraordinary story!" exclaimed Adrian Fleming.

"Read poor Kit's letter!" impatiently demanded Antoinette.

"Yes, here it is," said Net. And she unfolded the second letter, and read:

"CHURCH LANE, CHELSEA, LONDON,

"december the —, 18—.

"MI DEAR MISTRESS NET: I no I hevint got enny rite to rite to yo after behavin so bad to yo, but aint as bad as looks. mistress Net, I didn't brake mi prommis to yo when I cum away. I prommissed not to go away with him until he took me away to his own fowke and owned me for his lawfull wife.

"Yo mind the last nite I stade at yore house when I was so loe in mi mind with somethink hevvy, hevvy hangging

over mi poor head? Well mistress Net it was so tho I diddent know it then.

"It was him wot was hangging over my poore hed all unbenonst to yo or me.

"I wasn't expectin to se him no more than the eevil one himself, whol he stole in upon me that nite as I set all alone in the kitchen and tolde me he hed kum to take me home to his fowke, and I must kum rite off. Mistress net I begged and preyed of him to let me go and tell yo but he wuddent. He tolde me he had kum to kepe his prommis and take me to his fowkes but if I diddent kum with him then he wud never aske me agane.

"And so he bullyded me until I goed with him.

"But mistress he nevver kept no prommis with me, but browt me to Lunnun town to a lodgement house with a Mistress Purkkings, a good woman, I will say that for her, where I have lived for all this time and he only kumming to see me once in a whyle and skolding and threttening of me till I am fair crazy which he sed, himself that he wud clap me into a lunacy sylum if I wasn't quiet. And now mistress net to the pint—

"To-day he kum to see me lukking so black he skeered the life out of me most but he tolde me to get reddy to go with him home to Kavelande as because his uncle Old mister Chrystofer Corle was dedd and he was marster now and I shud be mistress.

"And fust I was glad mistress net but now my harrt misgives me like it did once before and hevvy, hevvy, hangs over mi poore head, ah! hevvy more hevvy as it hung that nite!

"I mebby doin of him a gret wrong mistress net and if I am I beg his pardon; but I do misdoubt him and fear him and I feel like somethink was going to happen to me.

"Ime thinking mebby insted of taking me home to Kavelande he will be clapping of me into a lunacy sylum where I will nevver be herd of no more. And now mistress net I rite this letter for mi safety. If he keeps his prommiss to me and takes me to Kavelande and make a leddy of me I will rite to yo and all my friends to let yo know I am well, and hoping yo the same; but if he dont take me home and claps me into a lunacy, then yo wont hear nothing from me after that, but yo will get this

letter sent to yo by the goode woman I live with, because I will leave it with her and make her prommiss to send it to yo if as how *she* dont get a letter from me dated at Kavelande to tell her I am well and happy in ten days.

"So if yo shud get *this* letter mistress net yo may know that he hazzent kep his prommiss to me to take me to Kavelande but has shet me up in a lunacy or med way with me sommers.

"Eh, mistress net wot a wicked gel I be not to trust my owne husbande wot I prommissed and wowed to luv, onner and bay, when it was redd over us in the church; but I cannt help it; he hev tuk all the trust out of me he hev.

"Eh, then if he keeps faith with me this time, I will try my best to luv, onner and bay him according to the lines red over us all the rest of my life.

"Oh, mistress net how I wish I hed nevver seen him though. How I wish I was back with yo and the bairns in the little cottage, where I was so safe and happy.

"Eh, it was hevven there it was.

"Sometimes I dreeme I am back with yo, washing up the dishes with my sleeves rolled up and I am so happy until I wake and find it all a dreeme and then I cry fit to brake my harrt I do.

"I dunnot think I evver luvved enny body rale tru but my own home fowke and yo and the bairns.

"But I wanted to be a leddy like a fule and this is wot I hev got for it.

"Now, mistress net I no yo will forgive and forget and if this letter cums to yo, to tell yo I hevvent been herd of since I left this place on this Thursday afternoon of December the —, please see to it that Mister Brendon Corle is tukked up and med to tell where he hev poked me to, and so I be tuk to the judges to say whedder I be lunacy or not.

"And Lord forgive me for doubting of my owne husbande which hev killed all the faith in me, and med me feele like as if I was a helpless, friendless sinner given up to the power of the deevil himself.

"Dear mistress net forgive me and prey for me and believe me, with all my fawlts yor luvving humble servant to kummand.

"CHRISTELLE KEN by rites mi leddy BRENDON CORLE."

As Net finished this strange epistle, there came a strong reaction over her nerves, and she burst into tears and wept long and bitterly.

"Poor Kit! Poor Kit Ken!" she sobbed. "Going to her death with that dark foreshadowing of fate over her simple, childish mind!"

"Ah! but she had cunning enough to write that letter! Heavens! what a Nemesis! what an avenging agent that woman has been to her own destroyer! Her first letter saved Lady Arielle Montjoie, and dashed *him* down suddenly from the pinnacle of his ambitious hopes. He compassed her murder in the spirit of hatred and revenge, and now, from her grave, she exerts a power that will crush him. That letter, supported by the corroborative testimony of the lodging house keeper and the cabman, will be enough to vindicate Valdimir Desparde and to hang Brandon Coyle," said Adrian Fleming.

"It is all too much, too dreadful to think of," shuddered Antoinette.

"Is there a train for London this evening?" inquired Net.

"One at eight, which you cannot possibly catch," answered Adrian Fleming.

"Which is the next?" inquired Net.

"Twelve, midnight."

"I must take that."

"You are mad! Start alone at midnight in the train for London!" exclaimed Antoinette.

"Yes, dear, I must do so—I must not lose one hour if I can avoid it," repeated Net. "I must take these letters at once to Yockley, and put them in the hands of Valdimir Desparde's lawyers."

"But at midnight—alone!"

"She shall not go alone," said Adrian Fleming.

"Why not? I am not afraid," said Net.

"Because I do not think it either safe or proper that you should start on that midnight journey alone," replied Adrian.

"I have been constrained by *duty* to do some things that *were* not safe and *seemed* not proper, within the last year," quietly replied the girl.

"But those days are past and gone, Mrs. Fleming," re-

torted the young husband with the air of taking some authority upon himself.

"Have they really? And are you quite certain they will never return? I am not," said Net, speaking very gently.

"Come, come, do not quarrel! Will you two *never* be reconciled?" inquired Antoinette, uneasily.

"We are not at enmity," answered Net.

"By Jove, I think you have ceased to care for me, as well as to trust in me," muttered Adrian Fleming, in a very low voice; then, with a sudden flush, he continued: "I know that I have forfeited all claims to your consideration; but I cannot really suffer you to start on a long journey at midnight, and alone. I must attend you, but, madam, I will treat you with as much distant respect as if I were only your courier or your footman."

Now Net's delicate face flushed. She spoke but one word.

"Adrian," and then her voice died away.

"You must accept my escort, Net," he added.

"Adrian," she recommenced, with recovered firmness, "if I hesitated, it was because I *once* accepted your escort on a journey rather too hastily, too unadvisedly; and you know what followed."

"Don't speak of that time, Net. It is reminding a sane man of the acts of his madness. I do not regret that journey, Net, but I repent what followed. And now I shall go with you to Yockley."

"I do not decline your escort, Adrian. I thank you for taking so much trouble," she replied, gently.

All her words and tones were very gentle, yet they all betrayed that her confidence in the reality and stability of his affection for her was shaken to its foundation.

"Well, I am glad that you are going together. But, dear Net, come back to me as soon as you can," said Antoinette with a smile.

"Indeed I shall! Oh! I regret very much to leave you, even for so short a time. I would send these letters by mail and remain here, only—only a life may depend upon their safe delivery, and I feel bound to take them myself. But just as soon as I see them secure in the hands of Mr. Stair I will hasten back to you," said Net.

"Bede says that I am much better. I hope I shall be here when you return, Net," said Antoinette, cheerfully.

"I hope that your improvement may be a permanent one, dear," replied Net, raising the hand of the sick girl to her lips.

"Ah! well, 'Hope springs eternal in the human breast,'" quoted Antoinette, in a non-committal sort of way.

"Net, it is eight o'clock. You had better see about your packing, had you not? It takes two hours to drive to the station," said Adrian Fleming.

"I brought nothing but a valise here, and I shall take nothing but a small hand bag back. I can be ready to start in fifteen minutes," said Net.

"And you have two hours before it is necessary to start to catch that train. It is eight, now, as Adrian says. You need not leave here until ten. So, Mr. Fleming, you may ring and order the close carriage for that hour, and then come back to take tea with us in this room," added Antoinette, as she rang the little hand bell that stood on the stand by her side.

Adrian Fleming left the room to give orders about the journey, and a few moments later Mrs. Trimmer entered in answer to her mistress's bell.

"Tell Hart to serve tea in this room," said Miss Deloraine, and the woman withdrew to obey.

Twenty minutes later the three friends were gathered around the tea table, which was pushed up close to Antoinette's invalid chair.

Scarcely ever had Miss Deloraine seemed brighter or more cheerful than at this little social tea. No one then looking at her, in ignorance of her real condition, could have believed her to be the subject of a fatal malady. It is true that she was very much emaciated, but she was no longer pale. Pleasant excitement in the society of her two friends had brought color to her cheeks and lips, light to her eyes, and animation to her manner.

Soon after tea the nurse came in and insisted that Miss Deloraine had already sat up too long and must now retire.

Antoinette laughingly bade Adrian good-night and dismissed him, but she retained Net by her side until the latest minute, making the girl accompany her to her bed

chamber, and even sit by her bed head until it was time for Net to put on her bonnet and join Mr. Fleming in the hall.

By ten o'clock Net kissed her cousin good-by, and, escorted by Adrian, set out on her night ride to the railway station.

They drove fast, and succeeded in catching the midnight express.

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## CHAPTER XXXII

### DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN

Pilgrims who journey through a stormy night,
  Observe, as nearer to the day you draw,
Faint gleams that meet you from the coming light,
  See darkness lighten more, till, full of awe,
You stand upon the sunlit mountain height.
TRENCH.

ON Monday the trial was to come on, and up to this day —Saturday—no witness could be found to prove an *alibi* for the prisoner.

Desparde's friends and his counsel were almost in despair; yet they concealed their gloomy misgivings from him.

Lord Beaudevere had left Vivienne Desparde at Castle Montjoie with Lady Arielle, and he himself had returned to Yockley and taken up his quarters at the White Bear Inn; not the best public house in the town by any means, but the nearest to the prison, and therefore the most convenient.

Early on this Saturday morning, Lord Beaudevere went to the prison, and was at once admitted to the cell of his kinsman, where he had promised to meet Messrs. Stair and Turner, counsel for the prisoner.

These gentlemen had not yet, however, arrived.

He found Valdimir Desparde alone, seated at his little table and suffering under a deeper depression of spirits than he had yet exhibited.

He started up from his chair to meet the baron as the latter entered the cell.

"Any news?" was the question simultaneously asked by the visitor and the prisoner as their hands met.

"None whatever," was the simultaneous answer. "Are not Stair and Turner coming? They promised to meet me here at nine o'clock. It is nearly half past—here they are now!" suddenly exclaimed the baron, as footsteps were heard coming down the corridor.

The next moment the door was opened and Messrs. Stair and Turner were ushered in.

"Any news?" was the question simultaneously uttered by the two men in the cell and the two men entering it.

"None," was the answer in quartette.

They entered into a deep and earnest conference that lasted until two o'clock, when the "legal gentlemen adjourned to the White Bear for luncheon, while Lord Beaudevere and Valdimir Desparde partook of refreshments sent from the same house.

At three o'clock the gentlemen met again in the cell of the prisoner, where the consultation was resumed.

They had been in deep conference for about an hour when footsteps were heard coming down the corridor, the door was once more opened, and Adrian Fleming entered the cell with a veiled lady on his arm.

Exclamations of surprise from Lord Beaudevere, and of pleasure from Valdimir, arose in chorus as the two gentlemen left their seats and held out each a hand to welcome the new comer.

"Glad to see you, my dear boy! Didn't know you were in England. Thought you were abroad still," exclaimed Lord Beaudevere, heartily shaking his hand.

"When did you arrive? You must have made up your mind suddenly, and followed me by an early steamer," said Valdimir Desparde, speaking in the same moment.

"Thanks, Baron; I am equally happy to meet you. Yes, Desparde, that is just what I did—made up my mind suddenly and followed you by the next steamer. My rencontre with you, followed by your departure, made me so homesick that I hurried after you by the next ship," exclaimed Fleming, answering right and left.

"And how very good of you to come and see me here so

soon," exclaimed Valdimir. Then, remembering the presence of others, he said: "You know Mr. Stair and Mr. Turner, I believe?"

"I have that pleasure," said Fleming, bowing to the gentlemen indicated, who returned his salutation.

This passed in about two minutes, during which Net stood, veiled and silent.

*"And this lady?"* queried Lord Beaudevere, in a low voice; for his old-school courtesy was scandalized at the seeming neglect in which the lady stood.

The young gentleman smiled slightly as he took Net's hand and presented her, saying:

"My wife, Mrs. Adrian Fleming. She has some evidence to offer in this case which I think you will consider very important for the defense."

In the meantime Net had thrown aside her veil, and was shaking hands with her old friend, the baron.

"How did you leave your cousin, my dear?" he kindly inquired.

"She is better; yet I should not have left her but to bring you some evidence on this case which was too precious to be trusted to the mails," said Net, as she dived into the folds of her sack and drew from an inner pocket a large, thick letter, which she handed to the baron.

"What is this, my dear?" he inquired, examining the packet earnestly, while Desparde and his counsel, at the words "evidence" and "defense" gathered around him.

"It is the same packet that was forwarded from Miston to Castle Montjoie, and from Castle Montjoie sent by you to me at Deloraine Park."

"And it is—it is—what is it?" demanded the baron, beginning to unfold the many pages.

"It is a posthumous letter from the poor murdered girl, Kit Ken——" began Net.

"Read them, Stair," replied the baron, passing the letters over.

The barrister read them first, silently while his companions watched him eagerly.

Then he looked up and said:

"These will do, Mr. Desparde. But now I must go out and get an officer sent to London at once to subpœna and bring down three witnesses from London—the cabman

Nott, the landlady, and her maid-of-all-work. Mr. Desparde, I congratulate you. We can dispense with the *alibi* now, since the murderer is identified," said Stair, as he was about to leave the cell.

"Hi! Stop! You are not going to take those letters away without telling us their contents?" exclaimed Lord Beaudevere.

"My dear Baron, I have no time to wait. These witnesses must be got down here by Monday morning. I must see an officer start by the first train for London with the subpœna. Here, Turner, you can read these letters aloud for the benefit of all concerned. Begin with the landlady's first. It is the best-looking letter. You will know it by that. Desparde, I will see you again before the doors are closed. *Au revoir.*"

And he hurried away. Mr. Turner took up the letters to read them.

Before he could find the place to begin, Stair came hurrying back, put his head into the door, and exclaimed:

"I say, Turner! Don't lose or mislay those letters! They are a thousand times more precious than their weight in diamonds!"

"Be easy, they are perfectly safe," answered the younger counsel.

And as Stair's footsteps again receded from the door, Turner opened the landlady's letter and read it aloud, interrupted now and then, by the exclamations, comments or questions of his small audience.

After finishing it he took up Kit Ken's letter, and read that from beginning to end, though with much more difficulty than had attended the perusal of the landlady's epistle because of poor Kit's imperfect spelling, writing and pointing.

Many comments followed the reading of this piteous letter; some tears were shed by Net and Baron Beaudevere over the tragic fate of the poor victim.

In less time than was expected, Mr. Stair came back, and reported that he had got his officers armed with a subpœna for the witnesses wanted, and that he had started them off to London by the train that had left.

"We have done our mission here now," said Net, "and we may go. Mr. Desparde, I am very glad to have brought

you down these letters, which are to be such powerful agents in your defense," she added, turning kindly towards the young man.

"Mrs. Fleming, I shall hold you in grateful remembrance so long as I live," earnestly replied Desparde.

"I don't see any ground for gratitude in so simple an act," replied Net.

Then turning to the baron, she said:

"Lord Beaudevere, I could not before bring my little personal interests into a discussion involving such solemn results, but now I would like to know how my babies are?"

"Plump and blooming as autumn apples! Appetites like little pigs! Petted by all the family, and toadied by all the servants like a little prince and princess! They are spoiling them finely for you, my dear!" heartily responded the baron.

"Thanks. I am very glad to hear they are well," replied Net, with a happy smile. "And now, I think, we must take leave. I wish to get the next train; for I promised my cousin to hurry back to her."

"But, my child, you have been traveling incessantly for eighteen hours, now are you going to turn right back and travel eighteen more?"

"Yes, Baron, for so I promised my cousin, and she is ill," gently replied Net.

"And *you* will be ill if you do not take care. Mr. Fleming, are you going to allow your wife to do this willful deed?"

Adrian shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

Net took leave of her friends and went off to the train, escorted by her husband.

They were soon on their way back to Devonshire.

The baron and the counsel remained in the cell with the prisoner, not intending to leave him until they should be compelled to do so by the prison regulations for the closing of the doors at six o'clock.

It was scarcely five when Net went away.

They had conversed but a few minutes when other steps were heard approaching the door, and one of the clerks from Mr. Turner's law office entered the cell with a telegram in his hand.

"This has just arrived, sir, and by your orders I bring it to you."

"Very well, Kinch," replied Mr. Turner, breaking the seal of the envelope and examining its contents.

Then he sprang up, exclaiming:

"Hurrah for us! 'It never rains but it pours?' Listen to this:

"'JOHN HARRIER, *Scotland Yard, London, to* TOBIAS TURNER, ESQ., *Barrister, Yockley:* We have dropped down upon an old party who came over on the *Colorado* with Mr. Desparde, and afterwards rode on the same train with him from Southampton to Peterboro, and will be able to prove an *alibi,* since he knows that Mr. Desparde could not have been at Paddington on the day he was said to have engaged the reserved compartment of the railway train in which the poor girl was found murdered.'"

"Kinch!" exclaimed the lawyer, "go immediately and telegraph John Harrier to have that man subpœnaed and sent here to testify on Monday. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir, certainly; but here is a letter that also came, postmarked Dunross, that I thought you might like to see," added the clerk, putting in his principal's hand a large white envelope with a staring red seal, and then leaving the room.

Mr. Turner asked permission of his companions and then broke the seal.

"I told you so!" he exclaimed, when he had run his eyes over this letter. "'It never rains but it *pours,*' quotha! I say it never rains but it turns to a Noah's flood. Listen here:

"HETHERBY HALL, KILLCUTHIE,
"December —, 18—.

"TO TOBIAS TURNER, ESQ.—*Sir:* I have just seen your advertisement for a gentleman who rode from Peterboro to the Grand Junction on the night of December the — with a dark-complexioned young man, in an ulster great-coat and a railway cap, who had recently returned from America, and conversed about the relative advantages of that country and *this,* and so forth.

"Now, I am the man you want, though I do not see how it can be for my 'advantage' to be found, unless the young fellow, who seemed to take a great fancy to me, has died and left me all his money, and I don't see how he could do that unless he knew my name, which he don't.

"Anyway, I am willing to be found.

"Here I am, and this is my name and address:

"ALEXANDER MCQUILLIGAN,
"Hetherby Hall, Killcuthie,
"Lock Ronald, Sutherland.

"P. S.—Would have answered your advertisement before this if I had seen it sooner; but have been knocked up with bronchitis for the last week or ten days, during which I never glanced at a paper.

"Only just now got about and found your advertisement."

"What do you think of that?" inquired Turner, with a triumphant smile.

"I think our case is all right now! We must subpœna this gentleman and let him know what we want with him! I hope he will not be greatly disappointed on finding out that it is not to give him a fortune that has been left him," said Mr. Stair.

"Do you remember this man by his own letter, Valdimir?" inquired Lord Beaudevere.

"Yes, I do," replied Desparde, with a droll air. "He is one of those poor and pompous old Highlandmen who would probably insist upon being called 'The McQuilligan.' I remember him perfectly."

But the hour had now come for the visitors to take leave.

They all arose and bade a cordial good-night to the lonely but now hopeful prisoner.

"Well, Mr. Desparde," said Mr. Turner on leaving him, "we most heartily congratulate you on this day's developments. We may now go into court with the most confident anticipation of a triumphant victory."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE TRIAL

Justice, when equal scales she holds, is blind;
Nor cruelty nor mercy change her mind;
When some escape for that which others die,
Mercy to those to these is cruelty. DENHAM.

What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just,
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.
SHAKESPEARE.

ADRIAN and Net caught the 5 P. M. express at Miston, and traveling day and night without the loss of an hour, reached Deloraine station at ten o'clock the next morning.

They found the same cab waiting beside the platform which had taken Net to the hall on the morning of her first arrival.

Adrian engaged it at once and handed Net into her seat.

"Ask the man if he knows how Miss Deloraine is to-day," whispered Net, as she settled herself on the hard cushions.

"Have you heard any news of the young lady at the hall, this morning?" inquired Mr. Fleming.

"The young lady was ill last night, sir. Hart, he come at ten o'clock for Dr. Bede; I had been out with a party and met him taking the doctor back," replied the man, touching his hat, not only once but at every other word he spoke.

"That was last night; but how is the young lady this morning? Better, it is to be presumed," hastily inquired, or rather suggested, Mr. Fleming, on seeing the increased anxiety of his companion.

"Haven't heard to-day, please, sir," answered the man, trying to make up by the abundance of his courtesy for the scarcity of his information.

"Well, then, take us thither—to the hall—as fast as possible! An extra half-crown, mind you, for extra haste,"

exclaimed Fleming, as he sprang into his seat and closed the door.

"All right, sir," answered the cabman, as he touched his hat, mounted to his seat and started his horses.

They bowled on at a rapid rate and made the distance in an hour and a half.

As the cab rolled through the park gate, which was held open by an elderly woman, the driver inquired:

"Say, Mother Swing! How is the young Missus up at the house?"

"Bad as bad, when the doctor passed through here, arter leavin' of her last night. Him be gone up again this morning. Spects to hear when he comes back," answered the woman.

*"Gat 'long!"* exclaimed the cabman, addressing his horses as he lashed them up to a brisk trot along the avenue.

As they drew in sight of the house, Net, with her head at the side window, anxiously watched for some sign to hint or some person to tell of the condition of Antoinette Deloraine.

They met a boy in a smoke-frock with his hands in his pockets.

"How is your young mistress this morning?" inquired Net.

"Anan?" cried the lad, with mouth and eyes equally wide open.

"Miss Deloraine! How is she this morning?" repeated Net, with only a slight alteration in the form of her question.

"Oi dunnoo," answered the boy, sauntering along on his way.

They came in sight of the house.

Net looked out eagerly.

There was no hatchment up over the portals, nor any other sign of death in the house.

The doctor's gig was standing before the door.

As they drove up, Net saw Dr. Bede come out of the house—a tall, gaunt, stooping old man of seventy-five years, with a thin, sharp red face and a bald head, with a slight fringe of silver hair behind his ears and at the nape

of his neck. He wore a long, straight black coat buttoned up to his chin and down to his toes.

Without waiting for him to get into his gig, Net beckoned him to the window of the cab.

"How is Antoinette this morning?" she inquired.

"Much better, I am happy to say, my dear young lady," answered Dr. Bede.

"I hear that she was very ill last night," continued Net.

"*Very,* ma'am. She lay so long in a fainting fit that I began to think I should never bring her out of it."

"What caused it—any excitement?"

"No, nothing of the sort; the housekeeper and the nurse were with her at the time, and she was in the midst of giving some commonplace directions to the former, when all of a sudden, she dropped. This was about eight o'clock, and the stupid women lost some time in trying to bring her round themselves before they sent Hart after me. With all the haste I could make, it was half past ten before I got here, and she had lain unconscious all the time. However, she seems all right again now, or, rather, as near being all right as she ever can be in this world! Good-morning, madame! good-morning, sir!"

And with a bow the worthy doctor got into his gig and drove away.

Adrian alighted and paid the cabman and discharged him; but *he,* mindful of warmth and refreshment for "man and beast" on the occasion of his last visit to the house, instead of wheeling off and going back, kept on around by the stable, where he committed his horse to the care of one of the grooms for rest and food, while he himself walked to the house and entered the kitchen to be coddled and comforted by the cook.

Meanwhile, Adrian and Net had been admitted by the hall porter and conducted upstairs by Hart.

In the upper hall they found Mrs. Trimmer waiting.

"My mistress desired that you should come to her immediately on your arrival, sir and madame," said this Abigail.

"How is she now?" inquired Net.

"As bright as usual this morning, ma'am; but we thought she was gone last night," answered the woman, as she opened the door of the boudoir and announced:

"Mr. and Mrs. Fleming."

Net and Adrian entered.

Antoinette, in an elegant robe of pale blue silk, trimmed with swan's down and with her beautiful raven-black hair carelessly but gracefully dressed, reclined in her rose-colored easy chair, with her feet upon a rose-colored foot cushion.

But how alabaster white and semi-transparent her wan face looked in contrast to the shining, jetty blackness of her hair!

"Ah, you have come back—I am glad to see you!" she said, cheerfully, holding out a hand to each.

Net could scarcely keep back her tears, so marked an alteration for the worse did she perceive in Antoinette's look and voice.

Little more than the merest civility passed between this strangely-wedded, parted and reunited pair. Loving each other ardently, they were still somewhat estranged—on Adrian's side by his consciousness of his former wrongs to Net, and his pride in belief that he had already made all the amends that he was able to make, and as much, indeed, as any "man" could bring himself to make; and on Net's side, by the bitter and humiliating memory that she had been once too easily won to marry him when he believed that he was marrying her rival. Much as she loved him she could not fully trust him, and she was resolved not to deceive herself, or allow him to deceive her again.

So she waived all his advances with a perfectly gentle courtesy, which infuriated him, because it gave him *nothing*—not even just cause of offense.

It would have been some comfort to have quarreled with Net. Yes, since he could not make love to her, the next best thing would have been to find fault with her, he thought.

But she gave him no opportunity to do the one any more than the other.

Altogether the young man was in a very bad humor when he left the breakfast table with Net.

Antoinette was looking so well, and so quiet that Net thought she might now broach a subject which she had been dreading to approach all the morning.

"And now, dear, I must tell you something that I *hate* to trouble you with," said Net, uneasily.

"And what is that?" inquired her cousin.

"I am called for the defense, and I must be in Yockley on Tuesday morning. Consequently I must leave here to-morrow morning."

"Oh, Net!" exclaimed the sick girl, in dismay.

Adrian stared at her in astonishment.

"How is that? You never told me that," he said, in displeasure.

"You never hinted it, Net!" said her cousin.

"You need not escort me on this occasion, Mr. Fleming. I know the route quite well by this time, and I shall be leaving in the early morning instead of at midnight," said Net, with gentle courtesy.

"But you will be arriving at Yockley at midnight, which will be much worse than starting from here at the same hour. I shall attend you. I do not choose that you shall take such a journey alone. You are my wife," answered the young man, coldly.

"And it will not hurt *him* to fatigue himself. He has got nothing else to do," said Antoinette, with an amused look.

Adrian shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

He soon excused himself and walked out, leaving the friends together.

Net spent the day in Antoinette's room.

The half estranged young married pair did not meet again until they met at the dinner table, where the butler and the footman were both in attendance.

"Do you know that you acted very wrong in that matter of returning here only to have to take the journey back again to-morrow?" began Adrian Fleming, at length, disregarding the presence of the servants.

"I have already explained my motives of action. They seemed more than justifiable—they seemed obligatory to me, and, I hoped, satisfactory to others," answered Net, with mild affability that disarmed her accuser.

"Bah! She will neither love me nor quarrel with me!" said Adrian to himself.

After dinner they took tea with Antoinette in her boudoir, and remained with her until eight o'clock, her hour for retiring to bed.

Then Mr. Fleming bade her good-night and good-by, as

they would be off in the morning before Miss Deloraine's hour for rising.

But Net remained with her friend, helped to undress and get her to bed, and then sat by her until Antoinette fell asleep, after which Net retired to her own room to make her few preparations for starting on her journey.

Meanwhile, Adrian Fleming, acting under protest, had ordered the close carriage and best road horses to be at the door at six o'clock in the morning, to go to Deloraine railway station.

Net's hurried journeying "to and fro on the face of the earth" had one good effect. They insured to her, whenever she found herself on a bed, the sound sleep of fatigue, notwithstanding the cares that were on her mind—cares connected with Antoinette Deloraine's illness, with Valdimir Desparde's trial, and with Adrian Fleming's false position towards herself.

She slept soundly until five o'clock, when, according to her previous orders, she was called.

While she was dressing by candle light, for it was still dark at five o'clock on that December morning, some one knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Net.

Mrs. Trimmer entered the room and said:

"If you please, ma'am, my mistress is awake, and sends her love to you, and asks that you will please to come in after you have had your breakfast and bid her good-by before you go."

"Certainly I will. Tell your mistress so. How is she this morning?"

"Bright as a bird, ma'am; but nurse says she means to make her go to sleep again after you have gone," replied the woman, and she left the room.

Net soon finished her simple traveling toilet, and hurried to the breakfast room, which was lighted by wax candles in the hanging chandelier.

The table was set for two, but there was no one in the room.

Net rang for coffee, and as soon as it was brought, with its attendant muffins, toast, eggs and rashers, she sat down and commenced her repast.

Adrian Fleming came in just as she was rising from the table.

"Excuse me," she said, gently. "Antoinette has sent for me and I must attend."

Adrian bit his lips.

"It is always Antoinette, or the children, or any one else than myself, who command your attention, Net," he said, sulkily.

"The dying have omnipotent claims on us, Adrian," she answered, quietly, as she left the room.

She found Antoinette lying on her beautiful and luxurious bed, looking as lovely, as happy and as comfortable as it was possible for an invalid to be.

"I sent for you not only to kiss you good-by and to wish you a pleasant journey, dear Net, but also that you may see for yourself and take away with you an impression that will make your mind easy on my account until you shall see me again. Net, I have not felt so well for the last three months, as I feel this morning. If you stay with me all the winter, I should not wonder at all if I should live to take that summer trip with you and the children which we have talked about. Net, I feel as if I were going to get well," she concluded, as she threw her arms around her cousin's neck.

"May the Lord in Heaven grant it!" fervently and sincerely responded Net, as she returned the embrace, and then seated herself on the side of the bed.

Antoinette raised up and drew out a little drawer from the table by her bed, and took from it her portemonnaie, which she opened and from which she took a five-pound note, saying:

"Now you know, Net, if I were up and about I should buy some books or toys to send the children. You must be my agent and buy them for me, Net——"

Little Mammam opened her mouth to object to the amount, but was quickly hushed by her cousin, who continued:

"I know that boy wants a velocipede as well as if I had heard him express the wish, and I know that girl wants 'another doll.' I know that all girls want another doll! I would get these things for the children, if I were up and well; but as I am in bed and weak, you must get them

for me and give them to the children, and anything else they would like— There, Net, not a word of opposition! Don't dispute with a sick woman, please! The doctor says I must be kept quiet! Now to be kept quiet, I must not be contradicted," added Antoinette, with a humorous smile.

"You are very, very good, and the children will be delighted," said Net, bending down and kissing her cousin.

"Come back as soon as you can *conveniently,* Net, and bring the children, and settle down here for the winter; it is much warmer here than in far Cumberland."

"Yes, I will come back and bring the little ones."

"And do not be uneasy about me, Net—*I am going to get well,"* said Antoinette, brightly.

"Heaven grant that you may, my dear."

"Look at the clock, Net, I do not want to make you lose the train. What is the hour?"

"It is ten minutes past six," answered Net, after glancing at the timepiece on the mantel shelf.

"And the carriage was ordered for six. You must go, dear. Kiss me good-by."

And so they parted.

She hurried downstairs and out to the carriage, where now Adrian Fleming was anxiously awaiting her.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE ARRAIGNMENT

It often falls, in course of common life,
  That right, long time, is overborne by wrong,
Through avarice, or power, or guile, or strife,
  That weakens her and makes opponent strong;
But Justice, though her doom she do prolong,
  Yet at the last she will her own cause right.

SPENSER.

ON the same Monday morning that witnessed the departure of the Flemings from Deloraine Park, the little town of Yockley was in an unusual commotion.

The assizes were to be opened that day.

The judges would enter the town at an early hour, and the great trial of the Crown *vs.* Valdimir Desparde, indicted for murder, was the first case on the docket.

The news of this impending trial, scattered broadcast through the country, had attracted a multitude of people to the scene.

Mrs. Perkins, Miss Mossop and Mr. Nott had arrived from London, and were accommodated at a lodging house within a stone's throw of the Guild Hall.

Mr. Michael McDermott and Mr. Alexander McQuilligan had also arrived, and were at the "Crown and Sceptre."

Net Fleming would certainly be on time—that they knew.

Even the photographs of the absent and the dead had been procured from the Miston photographer for identification by the witnesses.

Everything was arranged, down to the smallest detail, when at ten o'clock, the sheriff himself appeared at the cell door and intimated that he would conduct Mr. Desparde to the court room.

The carriage containing our party rolled into the back gate and up to the back door, unsuspected and unmolested.

The prisoner's entrance had been managed so quietly that no one suspected his identity or noticed him in any way.

The business of the trial was begun.

The jury was impaneled from the crowd in the court room, and in a very short time, and then the prisoner was arraigned after the usual formula.

Thomas Potter, guard on the London and Northwestern Railway train, was duly sworn.

He was severely cross-examined by the counsel for the defense, and especially as to the identity of Mr. Valdimir Desparde with the person who had engaged the reserved compartment.

But he was obstinately certain upon that point.

Being "cornered," however, he admitted that he had not recognized Mr. Desparde at Paddington, or, in fact, at any subsequent station until the train reached the Grand Junction, where he saw Mr. Desparde's face quite plainly for the first time; and that he saw it often from that time, un-

til they reached Miston Branch Junction, where he missed him.

The counsel for the prisoner made a note here.

The next witness called was Mrs. Jane Bottom, who, being sworn, testified to the finding of the dead body in the railway carriage.

She was followed by the Misses Ann Jane and Maria Bottom, who corroborated her testimony.

Edward Hetley, railway porter at Yockley station, and formerly of Miston, testified to having seen the body of the murdered girl, and recognized it as that of Christelle Ken.

Dr. Lowe, of Yockley, testified to having made the post-mortem examination and to the cause of death—a wound, made by some sharp-pointed instrument, through the heart.

Two of the doctor's medical assistants corroborated his testimony.

With these witnesses the case for the crown closed.

The court adjourned, with the understanding that on the following morning the senior counsel for the prisoner, Mr. Stair, would open for the defense.

After the court had adjourned the crowd lingered to get a view of the prisoner.

But the sheriff again circumvented them by quietly withdrawing Valdimir Desparde through the door on the left of the judges' bench leading into the sheriff's office, and thence down the stairs to the back door.

Lord Beaudevere followed, and they all entered the carriage that was in waiting.

The baron accompanied his kinsman to the prison and remained with him in his cell, conversing cheerfully on his prospects until the hour came for the closing of the doors.

Then, with the promise to be on hand early the next morning to attend him to the court room, Lord Beaudevere took leave and departed.

He entered his carriage and drove straight to the White Bear Inn, where he had taken up his temporary abode, not so much on account of the elegance and comfort of the quaint old house, as on that of its proximity to the prison.

Just as he stepped into the house, a waiter, who seemed

to be on the lookout, came up, touched his hair, and handed him a small black-edged envelope.

Lord Beaudevere recognized Vivienne's hand writing, opened it immediately and read the few lines it contained—

"DEAR BEAUE: Don't be angry. We are here. Arielle *would* come. I *had* to attend her. The housekeeper and butler, being a staid old couple, are with us in lieu of other attendants. We are in numbers 59 and 60. V."

The baron frowned and compressed his lips with vexation as he beckoned the waiter who had brought him the note.

"I suppose I must let them remain here until after the trial," muttered the baron. "The dare-devils! I had done my utmost to dissuade them to take this step. Well! well! I must not scold them, for both are as deeply concerned as I am in the matter which has brought me here."

The next morning Net made her appearance at the hostelry and was effusively greeted by the girls. Net was in earnest conversation with the girls, when they were interrupted by a knock at the door. Net herself went and opened it.

"A telegram for Mrs. Fleming," said the voice of the waiter.

"When did this come?" inquired Net.

"Yesterday afternoon, ma'am. It has been waiting in the office for you ever since," replied the waiter.

Net closed the door and opened the telegram. Then she dropped down upon the nearest chair, with a face blanched to marble.

The telegram was as follows:

"DELORAINE PARK, *December the* —, 12 *o'clock* M. DR. BEDE *to* MRS. ADRIAN FLEMING, *White Bear Inn, Yockley, Cumberland:* Miss Deloraine died at 7:15 A. M."

"What is it? A telegram did he say? Does it relate to the witnesses for the trial?" inquired Arielle, stepping out of bed to join her friend. "Why, Net, you are as white as a ghost! What is it?"

"It is—a telegram from—Antoinette's medical attendant—Dr. Bede. She is—there has been—a change," stammered Net, with quivering lips and brimming eyes.

"Antoinette has *gone!* She has changed this world for the next!" exclaimed Arielle, in an awe-struck tone. "You will not go back this morning?"

"No, it would be of no use to her for me to go, since she *is* gone; even if I were at liberty to do so, which I am not. I am subpœnaed as a witness on this trial, you know," gently replied Net.

"Yes, and your evidence is of vital importance to Valdimir."

"But, of course, I must return to Deloraine Park, just as soon as I am free to do so," replied Net, struggling hard to keep back the tears that sprang to her eyes.

She had seen so much of death in her short life—her father, her mother, her stepfather, her friends and relatives had dropped fast around her. In truth, Net needed all her Christian faith to support her spirit—needed every day to pray for faith and hope to sustain her wounded and suffering love.

At this moment Vivienne came out of the bathroom, dressed for the day.

She greeted Net with a kiss, ascribed her pale face to the fatigue of her night's journey and inquired how she had left Antoinette.

Then they told her the truth.

Vivienne was deeply shocked and grieved, though indeed she had been for some days past expecting to hear the sad news which had just reached them.

The clock struck nine and warned the three young women that they must make themselves ready to attend the court, which was to meet within an hour.

Net Fleming withdrew to the room engaged for herself, to make her clean toilet for the breakfast table and later for the witness stand.

Vivienne went into the parlor to communicate the news of Antoinette's death to Lord Beaudevere.

Half an hour later they all met around the board in Lady Arielle's private sitting room, where the Flemings had been invited to join their friends at breakfast.

"I am very glad you have come, Fleming," said the

baron, cheerfully; "for I was rather embarrassed with the presence of these two young ladies. Not expecting to find them here, I had promised Valdimir to go with *him* to the court, and but for your timely arrival I should have had to disappoint him, and I should not like to have done that, I assure you. Now, however, you can take charge of these girls and leave me to attend my kinsman."

"I shall be most happy to be useful," replied Mr. Fleming, with a grave bow, for he was still very much affected by the news of Antoinette's departure.

"You will have to get a second carriage, and, *mind*, drive to the Orchard street entrance, where I will take you all up through the sheriff's office to seats near the bench," concluded the baron, as they arose from the table.

The young ladies retired to put on their bonnets and the gentlemen went down to see to the carriages, that they might be well aired and comfortable—for the day was a raw, damp, cold one.

A few minutes later two carriages were drawn up before the door.

Beaue, with courtly grace, put the three young ladies in one of them, and, turning, said to Mr. Fleming:

"You had better drive at once to the Guild Hall. Enter by the Orchard street gate, as I advised you, and wait at the rear door until I come up. I have to go first to the prison; but it is not far, and I shall not be more than ten or fifteen minutes behind you."

Fleming bowed, entered the carriage, and seated himself beside Net.

The baron entered the second carriage.

And then both vehicles drove out of the inn yard and separated, the one taking its way to the prison, the other to the court house.

The distance to the prison was very short.

Lord Beaudevere found his kinsman and the sheriff already down in the hall on the ground floor.

Immediately after the morning salutations they all three entered the carriage to drive to the Guild Hall.

As they went on, the baron delighted his young kinsman with the news that his sister and his betrothed had arrived in town.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE VERDICT

The shadow of this woe will pass away,
Then will commence his high career,
He will rise up to it and make all possible,
The glory and the grandeur of each dream
And every aspiration be fulfilled.

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE carriage containing Lady Arielle Montjoie, Mr. and Mrs. Fleming and Miss Desparde was the first to reach the hall.

The court room was, if possible, even more crowded than it had been on the preceding day, the first of the trial.

Mr. Stair, the senior counsel for the prisoner, was already on his feet, opening the case for the defense.

He began by giving a slight sketch of his client, whom he said was well known to most persons present, and well-beloved and esteemed by all who knew him.

He then told the story of Valdimir Desparde's movements from the moment of his landing at Southampton on that fatal day of December to the moment of his arrest at Miston, and proposed to account for every instant of his time during that interval, and to prove by a host of competent witnesses that it was utterly impossible for him to have been the murderer of Christelle Ken, or to have been anywhere near the scene of the murder at the time of its perpetration.

He next told the story of the murder as he held, and proposed to prove, that it had occurred, and to support this theory he called—

"Mrs. Antoinette Fleming."

Net came forward and took the stand; and being duly sworn, she testified that the deceased, Christelle Ken, had been well known to her for several years.

And then, in answer to the questions of the counsel, she gave a full and particular history of poor Kit's acquaintance with Brandon Coyle and the circumstances that led her to the suspicion that Kit had been abducted or per-

suaded away by him; and then was offered the posthumous letter of poor Kit in evidence. It was read and it made a very great impression on all who heard it.

Then was offered the letter of Mrs. Perkins, which was also read with scarcely less effect.

Net was cross-examined by the counsel for the crown.

"Have you ever seen the prisoner at the bar in company with the deceased?"

"Never," answered Net.

"Have you any reason to believe that he had been intimate with her?"

"None whatever! I do not think Mr. Desparde even knew the girl Kit Ken, either by name or by sight!"

"Had the deceased other followers?"

"None whatever; not one, except Brandon Coyle."

The direct examination was then resumed, and Net told of Kit's former letter submitted to her by Lady Arielle Montjoie, and of the scene at the reading of the late Earl of Altofaire's will.

She was then allowed to retire, and the next witness was called.

"Mrs. Martha Curry."

This was the housekeeper at Castle Montjoie—a little dark-skinned, black-eyed woman of about fifty years of age.

She corroborated the testimony of the last witness in regard to the scene in the dining room at Castle Montjoie on the reading of the late earl's will. She also described the rage of Coyle, and his threats of vengeance against Kit Ken. This scene occurred, she said, on the — of December—the day before the murder.

Tobias Curry, husband of the last witness, and butler at Castle Montjoie, corroborated the testimony of his wife.

"Mrs. Deborah Perkins" was next called.

This woman, it will be remembered, was the landlady of the lodging house in Church Lane, Chelsea.

She was shown the photographs of Brandon Coyle and Kit Ken, and she identified them as portraits of her two lodgers, whom she had known as Mr. and Mrs. Coyle.

She gave a narrative of their arrival and sojourn at her house, and of their departure on the afternoon of the — day of December, preceding the night of the murder.

On being shown the letter purporting to have been written by herself to Mrs. Fleming, she identified it as her own. She identified the inclosed letter as the one intrusted to her by poor Kit to be sent to Mrs. Fleming in the event already mentioned.

She also testified to the suspicion and anxiety that troubled the poor girl lest her "husband" should do her a mischief on the journey, though her fears pointed rather to being betrayed into a private mad house than to murder.

Mrs. Perkins' testimony suffered nothing in the cross-examination that followed.

"Mary Mossop!"

The maid-of-all-work at the Church Lane lodging house took the stand, corroborated the last witness's testimony, and identified the photographs as likenesses of her mistress's lodgers, Mr. and Mrs. Coyle.

"John Nott!"

The cabman from Chelsea took the stand and testified to having driven Mr. and Mrs. Coyle from Church Lane to Paddington Station on the afternoon of the — day of December, and to having been present when Mr. Coyle engaged the middle compartment of carriage 2, B, on the London and Northwestern train for himself and his wife, and to having seen them both get into it just before the train started.

Being shown the two photographs, he identified them as the portraits of the parties he had, on the afternoon of the — day of December, taken from Church Lane to Paddington and seen enter the reserved compartment in carriage 2, B, and who were known to him as Mr. and Mrs. Coyle.

He was slightly cross-examined without effect, and then permitted to withdraw.

"Charles Smithers!"

This witness was the ticket agent at Paddington.

He swore to having been on duty at the window at the Paddington station on the — of December, and to having sold tickets for a reserved compartment in railway carriage 2, B, on the London and Northwestern railway train that left the station at four P. M.

"Witness, look at the prisoner at the bar," said the senior counsel for the defense.

Smithers turned and stared at Mr. Desparde, who smiled in his face.

"Was the prisoner at the bar the party to whom you sold the reserved compartment?"

"No, sir; he was not. I never saw the prisoner before in my life," replied Smithers.

"Very well. Now look at these photographs. Did you ever see the originals of *them* before?" inquired Counselor Stair, passing the cards of Coyle and Kit Ken to the man, who took and looked at them attentively, and then replied:

"Yes, sir. *These* are the likenesses of the man and woman who took the reserved compartment of carriage 2, B, on the London and Northwestern Railroad on the afternoon of that — day of December."

The witness was more closely questioned, but his testimony only established beyond all doubt that it was Brandon Coyle and *not* Valdimir Desparde who engaged the reserved compartment on the train in which his companion was afterwards a few hours later found murdered.

"John Gretterex!"

A portly, red-faced man of about forty years of age took the stand, and testified to knowing Mr. Brandon Coyle by sight, and by name, and to having seen him leave the middle compartment of railway carriage 2, B, at midnight, December the —, at the Grand Junction station, and having seen him get upon the train for Southampton.

"John Kent!" was next called.

This witness testified that he knew Mr. Brandon Coyle and that he traveled with him from the Grand Junction to Southampton on the early morning of December the —, and afterwards saw him embark on a steamer—the *Montana* for New York.

"Michael McDermott!"

A ruddy-faced young Irish gentleman took the stand and testified to having ridden in the same carriage with Mr. Valdimir Desparde from Southampton to Peterboro on the — day of December, instant.

"Alexander McQuilligan!"

A tall, gaunt, sanguine-hued and red-haired Scotchman took the stand and testified to having ridden in the same carriage with the prisoner at the bar, on the train from

Peterboro to the Grand Junction, where he got off, on the night of December —.

This was the last witness examined for the defense.

There was no rebuttal testimony introduced.

Mr. Turner reviewed the evidence and claimed that the defense had disproved all the charges of the crown and had proved the innocence of their client.

The Lord Chief Baron Belair summed up very briefly, saying that so clear a case needed no elucidation from him, and that he could safely leave it as the testimony left it—in the hands of an intelligent and impartial jury.

The jury consulted in their box, and, without leaving the court room, returned a verdict of—

"NOT GUILTY!"

This verdict was received with acclamations.

Friends and acquaintances came around the vindicated man with warm congratulations.

The crowd in the court room raised a shout that seemed to threaten to lift the roof.

The news spread outside, and the hurrahs of the assembled multitude rent the air.

The officers of the court did not attempt to preserve order on this occasion.

The judges came down from the bench and shook hands with Mr. Desparde and his immediate friends. So did the queen's counsel, Parker, and his assistants.

And through all this the shouts and hurrahs of the people rose to heaven.

Never in this world was there a more triumphant vindication.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### VICTORY

And thus, from the sad years of life,
We sometimes do short hours, yea, minutes strike,
Keen, blissful, bright, never to be forgotten;
Which, through the dreary gloom of time o'er past,
Shine like the sunny spots on a wild waste.
BAILLIE.

Wise Heaven doth see it just as fit
In all our joys to give us some alloys,
As in our sorrows, comforts; when our sails
Are filled with happiest winds, then we most need
Some heaviness to ballast us. FOUNTAIN.

WHEN the judges and the officers of the law had withdrawn, and the huzzas of the crowd, inside and outside the court house, had subsided, Valdimir Desparde and his friends retired through the sheriff's room and down the rear stairs to the Orchard street entrance, where the two carriages awaited them.

During the excitement in the court room he found no opportunity of approaching his betrothed or her companions, though he was most impatient to do so.

Lord Beaudevere then whispered to him:

"I will take Arielle downstairs and put her in the carriage. You can join her there, and no one else shall intrude upon you. I will go with Vivienne and the Flemings in the other carriage."

Valdimir pressed his hand in silent acquiescence, and then the baron led Lady Arielle out of the still densely-crowded court room and downstairs to the back entrance, and put her into one of the carriages, whispering, as he closed the door:

"Valdimir will join you here in a very few moments."

And almost as he spoke Valdimir Desparde came up.

Lord Beaudevere, with a smile, gave way, and the young man entered the carriage and seated himself beside his betrothed.

Lord Beaudevere gave the coachman his orders to drive

to the White Bear Inn, and then went to join the other members of his party who were seated in the other vehicle.

Both carriages started, that of the young lovers taking the precedence.

As soon as the betrothed pair found themselves alone together, Valdimir lifted the hand of Arielle and pressed it warmly to his lips and to his heart.

Tears of joy stood in his eyes.

Neither could speak, but their silence was more eloquent than any words could have been.

After a short drive, our party stopped at the inn.

Arielle had already laid off her hat and mantle, and was seated on a short, hard, horsehair sofa, in the parlor, with Valdimir by her side.

After a few pleasant words, Lord Beaudevere drew Adrian Fleming's arm within his own and took him out, ostensibly to see the landlord in person as to the condition of his larder, but really to leave the lovers to themselves for a little while; for Vivienne and Net had already gone to their chambers to lay off their hats and coats.

*Only* "for a little while" could the one private parlor in the crowded inn be left to the young lovers.

Very soon they were disturbed by the entrance of the waiter to lay the cloth for dinner.

When *he* went out the two young ladies, Net and Vivienne, came in.

Then, for the first time since the verdict, the brother and sister met, and embraced with so much emotion that scarcely an articulate word could be uttered between them.

Vivienne presented her brother to Net Fleming, whom he had not seen since his arrival in the country.

Mutual and hearty congratulations passed between them.

Net expressed her joy in his triumphal vindication, which she declared to be equal to a public ovation.

Valdimir returned thanks and wished her much joy in her married life.

"And to think," he added, in his total ignorance of the circumstances of that marriage, "to think that Sly Boots, Adrian Fleming, never told me a word about it when we met in New York, never even dropped a hint of it!"

At this moment the gentleman of whom they were speaking entered the room.

More congratulations followed, with more or less sincerity between Messrs. Desparde and Fleming.

Dinner was served, and six of the hungriest people in the town sat down to one of the best repasts ever laid there.

And they lingered long over its three courses and longer over the dessert.

It was ten o'clock before the last cloth was drawn and the coffee served.

While they were sipping this fragrant beverage the voice of the indefatigable and ubiquitous newsboy was heard under the windows, yelling:

*"'Ere's yer Evening Noose—full account of the trial—Muster Valable Despatch, and werdick for the 'cused. 'Ere's yer— "*

Lord Beaudevere arose and rang the bell.

A waiter entered in answer to the summons.

"Go down and bring me a paper," said the baron.

A few moments later the waiter entered the room with the paper and handed it to the baron.

"What an exaggeration! Why, Valdimir, they have got it here that your horses were taken off and your carriage was drawn through the streets by relays of men, followed by a multitude of citizens. Ha! what is this? Here is news!" continued the baron, as his eyes glanced to other parts of the paper.

"What is it?" inquired Valdimir Desparde.

"I will read it," answered Lord Beaudevere, and he began as follows:

" 'THE ASSASSIN OF CHRISTELLE KEN.

" 'There is not a shadow of a doubt in the minds of any who heard the evidence on the trial of Mr. Valdimir Desparde (whose honor has been vindicated amid such thunders of applause as never yet attended the acquittal of any person), that the murderer of poor Christelle Ken was no other than Brandon Coyle, of Caveland, Miston. Some dark stories have been afloat in regard to that gentleman, by which it appears that homicidal mania may be hereditary in his family. An officer armed with the necessary warrants has gone down to Liverpool and will sail to-morrow morning for New York in quest of Mr. Brandon Coyle, who has escaped to the United States, but it is

hoped will be found and brought back under the extradition treaty to answer for the crime for which Mr. Desparde has been so unjustly accused, and of which he has been so triumphantly acquitted.'

"There, that's it! They are prompt. They lose no time—these law officers. But I am grieved for Coyle—my poor, old neighbor. Ah! he hatched a couple of cockatrice's eggs when he took those two Simses to his home!" sighed the baron.

"But poor Aspirita is not to blame for all this," said Net, in a tone of compassion.

"Humph!" said the baron, dryly. "She is too much like her brother in everything to engage my sympathies. You do not know, perhaps, my dear, that she was his confederate in the transmission of those forged letters, that deceived and misled both Valdimir and Arielle, and but for providential agencies would have resulted in severing them forever."

"I knew of the letter purporting to come from Mr. Desparde to Mr. Coyle, giving a *mésalliance* as the motive of his sudden departure to New York, but I thought that Aspirita herself must have been also deceived when she inclosed it to Arielle," replied Net.

"No. Subsequent events proved that she was his confederate; for about the same time a forged letter, purporting to have been from Arielle to *her*—Aspirita—announcing Arielle's engagement to be married to a gentleman approved by her grandparents, was inclosed by Brandon Coyle to Valdimir Desparde. The brother could not have done all this without the assistance of his sister. She was his confederate in everything except in the murder of poor Kit Ken."

When the clock struck eleven they separated and retired to rest.

The following morning the members of our party rose early, and when the hurried morning meal was over they hastily assumed their outer garments and went out to take their places in the hacks.

A short and pleasant ride through the crisp winter air and over the frosty ground took them to the Miston Branch station, where the party separated—Lord Beaudevere, Lady

Arielle Montjoie, Mr. and Miss Desparde leaving the carriage to take the Miston train, and Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Fleming continuing their journey to London *en route* for Devonshire.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII

### AT DELORAINE PARK

Softly
She is lying
With her lips apart,
Softly,
While you're sighing
With a smitten heart.
Gently
She is sleeping—
She has breathed her last;
Gently
While you're weeping,
She to heaven has passed.

C. G. EASTMAN.

MR. AND MRS. ADRIAN FLEMING reached London late in the afternoon, and had only time to take a luncheon before getting their seats on the Southwestern train. They traveled all night, and about seven o'clock the next morning they reached Deloraine station.

They found the Deloraine carriage waiting for them.

"Ah, Beckwith! You got the telegram, then?" said Mr. Fleming, as the coachman touched his hat.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, repeating his gesture of respect.

The young footman, Harry Hart, opened the carriage door to admit his new mistress and master; then handed in the portmanteaus, closed the door again and sprang up behind.

The carriage drove off, taking its way towards the village and through the main street.

They drew up at the Deloraine Arms, where the swinging sign was swathed in black.

Here Adrian ordered coffee and muffins, which were brought to the carriage, where he and Net partook of them.

Then they continued their way through the village, where every house was closed and hung in mourning.

The carriage passed through the gates and wound its way along the road leading through the park up to the hall.

The footman sprang down and rang the bell, and the door was opened to receive the new mistress at the moment her husband handed her from the carriage.

The footman, going before, led the way upstairs and threw open the door of the drawing room.

But Net did not go there. She passed on to the rooms that had been appropriated to her private use, while she had been staying at the hall, and she shut herself in alone and rang for the housekeeper.

Nelly, the maid, answered the bell.

"I want Mrs. Koffy," said Net, who was too much agitated to remember her usually considerate and courteous manner to all—even the humblest with whom she might be brought into contact.

The girl went out and in a few moments Mrs. Koffy came in.

At the sight of her new mistress she threw her black silk apron over her head and began to sob and cry.

"Sit down and try to compose yourself. I wish you to tell me some particulars of your young lady's last hours."

Amidst tears and lamentations the housekeeper complied and gave as coherent an account of the sad event as it was possible for her to do.

The good domestic then finished her recital with the interrogation:

"That is all, ma'am. Would you like to see her?"

"Yes," said Net, with an irrepressible sigh.

The housekeeper arose to lead the way.

Net also arose and took off her bonnet and mantle to follow the woman, who conducted her to the boudoir where poor Antoinette Deloraine had passed the last days of her life, and where everything was now in the most perfect order. Thence they passed into the bed chamber where, on the rose-colored silk and lace-draped bed and under the rosy silk and lace tent-like canopy, lay, like the fair, waxen

image of a beautiful maiden, the form of Antoinette Deloraine.

Nurse Nolliss was moving softly about the room, replacing faded flowers with fresh ones. She courtesied to Mrs. Fleming, and then, having completed her task, she withdrew.

"You may also go, Mrs. Koffy. I wish to remain here alone, if you please," said Net, taking her seat beside the bed.

"Now don't you be taking on, my dear young lady; you will just be making yourself ill for nothing," expostulated the housekeeper, who mistook the motives of her mistress.

"I! Oh, no, I should not do so *here* of all places," quietly replied Net. The housekeeper withdrew and left Net alone in the sphere of ineffable peace which surrounds those who have recently fallen asleep in the Lord.

Net felt this and soon lost herself in a benign repose that lasted she knew not how long, but until she was aroused by a rapping at the door, followed by the entrance of the housekeeper, who said:

"If you please, ma'am, the master is asking for you, and luncheon is on the table."

Net arose, pressed her lips upon the ivory brow of the beautiful sleeper, covered the face again with its lace handkerchief, and withdrew from the chamber.

"The luncheon is spread in the large breakfast room below, madam. You will find Hart in the hall, who will show you the way," said Mrs. Koffy, as she left her mistress at the head of the main stairway, and turned to go down by the back steps.

Net went down and was duly shown by young Hart to the breakfast parlor, where she found the lunch table laid and several gentlemen besides her husband assembled.

They were all strangers to her; and Mr. Fleming proceeded to introduce them.

"My wife, Mrs. Adrian Fleming, gentlemen! My dear, the Rev. Mr. Deering, Rector of St. Andrew's Church, Deloraine; Dr. Bede, Mr. Philip Frodsham."

The gentlemen bowed, the lady bowed, and they all sat down to the table.

The luncheon passed off agreeably, but very gravely.

After it was over, Mr. Frodsham requested an interview

with Mrs. Fleming, who led him into a little parlor on the same floor.

Mr. Frodsham was a venerable, hale old gentleman of not less than seventy years, with a robust and upright form, a healthy, rosy face and a fine, stately gray head. He was the senior partner of the firm of Frodsham Brothers, who had had charge of the Deloraine estate for three generations of that short-lived family.

"My dear Mrs. Fleming, first of all I wish to express to you my warm admiration of the magnanimity with which you have acted towards your deceased cousin. You might have enriched yourself by dispossessing her, and the legal and moral right to do so was undoubtedly yours, and yet you forebore to do it! You permitted your unfortunate cousin to live and to die in the happy delusion that she was the legitimate daughter of the late Alfred Deloraine, and the legal heiress of Deloraine Park——"

"As she ought in justice to have been, Mr. Frodsham; I may have had the legal right to dispossess Antoinette, but assuredly I had not the moral right to do so. I *could not* have done so, indeed! And I am very glad and thankful that my dear Antoinette never suspected the misfortune that might have overwhelmed her reason had she learned it," said Net.

"You are a very rare and magnanimous young lady. I must tell you *that* before you go any farther. Now we must discuss business," said the attorney.

And he asked Net's instruction upon certain points to be attended to immediately; among them the details for the management of Antoinette Deloraine's funeral.

Net referred him to Mr. Fleming and to the rector. And so the interview ended.

The funeral was arranged to take place on that day week.

Letters were written to the few relatives of the Deloraine family that were left alive, and also to Sir Adrian and Lady Fleming, inviting them to attend the obsequies.

Not one from a distance responded in person, except the baronet, who arrived at Deloraine Park on the morning of the day set for the funeral.

Adrian Fleming had just gone out for a stroll through

the park. The baronet was welcomed by his daughter-in-law, in the little reception room on the first floor.

"Well, Saucebox!" was Sir Adrian's greeting to Net. "How are those little bones of contention, the children? I dare say you have come to your senses and got rid of them before this!"

"The children are well, Sir Adrian, and are still under my guardianship," gently replied Net.

"You do not mean to say that you have got them here, in this house!" exclaimed the old gentleman.

"Not just at present. I left them at Castle Montjoie, in the care of the countess, while I came to attend my cousin," said Net, with a slight smile.

"At—Castle Montjoie!—with the young countess!—those children!!!" exclaimed the baronet, staring.

"Yes, Sir Adrian. Every one has not the same aversion to children that you and Lady Fleming profess to have," answered Net.

"Well! They will not probably remain for the rest of their natural lives at Castle Montjoie. What do you intend to do with them afterwards?"

"I wish to bring them here; but——"

"Your husband will never consent to that absurd measure—never, if I know him!" interrupted the baronet.

Net made no reply. Her eyes sank beneath the hard, steady stare of the old man.

"What will you do in that case?" he demanded, without withdrawing his gaze.

A look of care and trouble crossed the gentle face of little mammam for a moment, and then passed off, as she said:

"I will 'take no thought of the morrow,' but 'let the morrow take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Sir Adrian, but for that text I should have passed many a sleepless night in the course of my troubled life."

"There—we won't argue—I am going to get some of this railroad dust out of my eyes! Where is your husband?" suddenly demanded the baronet.

"He has walked out. I expect him in every minute," replied Net.

"Tired of the house, I suppose. Never could bear con-

finement or solemnity. Both together too much for him. Well, I am going to my room. I suppose you have one ready for me?"

"Oh, yes, Sir Adrian, and Hart will show you to it."

"Well, I am going now to see if I can turn myself back again from a blackamoor to a white man, as I used to be. And then I shall want something to eat. When will lunch be ready?"

"As soon as you shall be ready for it, Sir Adrian."

With that answer from Net the baronet strode out of the room and was taken possession of by Hart, who conducted him to his chamber, where he found his valet already installed and employed in opening his dressing case and portmanteau and laying our their contents.

Net in the meantime hastened to the housekeeper and directed her to have something hot and appetizing for her exacting father-in-law.

Coming up from the consultation with Mrs. Koffy, Net met Adrian returning from his walk.

"Your father has just arrived," she said.

"Ah! Where is the old man?" he demanded, with pleasure in his eyes, because, with all his failings he loved his father.

"He has gone up to his room. The blue room next beyond yours," answered Net.

Adrian bounded upstairs, taking three steps at a jump and was soon out of sight.

Half an hour later the baronet, his son and daughter-in-law sat down to a dainty repast in the little dining room on the first floor.

Soon after this the funeral guests began to assemble.

All the county families in the vicinity of Deloraine Park came to pay their last tribute of respect to the youngest, fairest and last of the Deloraines.

The funeral took place in the afternoon. The remains were conveyed to St. Andrew's Church, at the head of the hall lane and at the upper end of the village. This church had been founded five centuries before by one of the earlier ancestors of the house of Deloraine, and the family vault was under the chancel.

The procession of carriages that followed the hearse ex-

tended nearly from the lodge gates to the church door, where the coffin was met by the rector.

The service consisted of the solemn and beautiful ritual of the Church of England.

At its close the mortal remains of Antoinette Deloraine were deposited in the crypt below the altar.

All the carriages then dispersed to their various destinations. Only those of the limited household returned to Deloraine Hall, where dinner awaited them.

The departed girl had been a minor, incapable of making a will, so that there was no after ceremony of opening and reading such a document to be performed.

Net Fleming was the heiress-at-law and came into immediate possession.

After dinner there remained in the house only Sir Adrian, who was to spend the night at the hall, and Mr. and Mrs. Fleming, who were to make it their permanent home.

It happened that some time after dinner Net went up to her dressing room to bathe her head, which was aching and burning from long-continued fatigue and excitement. Now her dressing room joined that of the old baronet, back to back, so that the same branch of pipes supplied both wash stands with water. Only a thin partition separated them.

As Net stood bathing her head over the wash basin she heard voices in the next room. At first she paid no attention, and so did not recognize them. They—the voices—might have belonged to the housemaid and valet for aught she knew or cared.

But presently she recognized the voices as those of her husband and her father-in-law; but still she did not listen, and therefore did not hear the purport of their conversation, until suddenly some words uttered by her husband struck her ear—ay! and struck her *heart,* nearly paralyzing her where she stood. She could not move; she could not speak; she could scarcely breathe, while she was compelled to listen.

And what were these words that smote all color from her cheeks, all light from her eyes, nearly all life from her frame?

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THOSE BITTER, BITTER WORDS

"Oh, no, father!" exclaimed Adrian Fleming, with a laugh that sounded so utterly heartless, under the circumstances. "Oh, no! you need not warn me! There is no danger of my being burdened with those imps! I do not *intend* to let my wife bring those children into this house! I have fully made up my mind on that subject. I have my own plans in regard to the parson's orphans, and I mean to carry them out at once, without consulting 'Mistress Net.' It saves a world of trouble *to act* instead of to talk!"

"So it does! I am glad to hear you say it! That is right, my boy! Do you be master! Your wife has been her own mistress so long that she has acquired a very strong will; but you must break it if you wish to rule in your home, as you should do. This *will* be your home, of course?" added the baronet, half interrogatively.

"Yes, in its season, and the town house on Westbourne Terrace, during the London season."

"Ah, to be sure! And it is a very good thing you have got them, else I do not know how you would have managed—had to come to Fleming Chase, perhaps, and that might have been awkward. There never was a house yet large enough for two families."

"No," assented Adrian.

"But mind you, my boy, do not, because this fine estate is your wife's inheritance, and not yours, fall into the lamentable weakness of becoming a mere cipher in your own house. You must assert yourself as master, and one of your first acts of authority should be to pack those children off to the alms house, if she objects to the Clerical Orphan's Home for them," said Sir Adrian, decisively.

"I shall place them in the Orphan's home myself, before a week is over their heads, and I shall not take the trouble to consult Mrs. Adrian Fleming on the subject. I shall take her by surprise, with the deed accomplished," replied the young man, with a laugh that sounded, ah!

how harshly, and cruelly to the wounded ears and heart of the listening woman.

"And now, mind you, keep to that resolution. Don't be persuaded out of it."

"I tell you I shall not consult her; how, then, should she have the opportunity of trying to persuade me out of it?" inquired Adrian, somewhat impatiently.

"After it is all over, when she finds out how you have disposed of the children, you will have some difficulty with your wife. You will have to meet opposition, arguments, pleadings, tears, hysterics, Lord knows what!"

"I shall know how to meet them!" laughed the young man.

"That is right! Don't you yield a jot! If you should feel tempted for an instant to do so, just take time to consider what a burden those children would be to you. And how that burden would increase with years—growing heavier and heavier every year. *Now* it would be a nurse maid and nursery governess to be maintained as well as the children; then in a few years a tutor and a governess; then private masters for the girl, and Eton and Oxford for the boy; then a commission or a profession for him and a marriage portion for her."

"A formidable array of responsibilities," laughed Adrian.

"Yes! and marrying as early as you and your wife have done, you may expect a very large family of your own. Think of that! and send these brats to the alms house at once and be rid of them," concluded the baronet, as he was heard to walk away.

"As I said before, I shall put them in the Orphan's Home before a week is over their heads, and without consulting my wife on the subject," reiterated Adrian Fleming, as he followed his father out of the room.

Then all Net's strength forsook her and she sank down upon the floor and buried her face in her folded arms on the cushion of her chair.

Oh, the hardness, the coldness, the selfishness and treachery of the words she had just unwillingly overheard.

Her bitter anguish was not caused alone by grief for the prospective fate of the children, but by shame for her husband's conduct.

Was this the man she had vowed before Heaven to love and honor? Whom she did devotedly love and tried sincerely to honor?

Nothing but his own self-convicting words could have convinced her that he, Adrian Fleming, could be guilty of such baseness as he now proposed.

In all her former troubles—and she had had her share, as we know—she had been enabled by faith to "cast 'her' burden on the Lord," and to feel that he did "sustain" her.

But she would not do so now. She seemed to have no strength to raise the burden to cast it anywhere. She sank under it and let it settle down upon her like the heavy stone of a sepulchre. She could not seek comfort in prayer, she could not even find relief in tears.

While she lay there, with her head buried in her folded arms on the cushion of her chair, the little maid, Cally, came through all the suite of apartments, looking for her mistress, and finally reached the dressing room and started back in affright to see the lady in that abject position.

"Oh, madame! madame! Are you ill?" she cried, apprehensively, approaching.

"Yes, give me your hand, child," faintly replied the lady, as she endeavored to rise.

The frightened girl gave both her hands to her mistress, who got upon her feet, and leaning on her maid, walked to the bedroom.

"Shall I call Mrs. Koffy, madame?" inquired Cally.

"No, child. Help me to undress, and then you may bring me a strong cup of tea. I have a splitting headache, and must go to bed," replied Mrs. Fleming, sinking down into her easy chair, and putting her feet out to the little maid, who knelt to unlace her boots.

"Indeed, I do not wonder, dear madame, with all you have gone through this week, traveling backwards and forwards from one end of England to t' other, between a murder trial there and a funeral here! It is a wonder you have not been down in your bed before this, ma'am. I don't know how you kept up," said Cally, as she put away the boots, and began to take down her mistress's hair and comb and brush it out.

"Does it do your head any good, my combing it out so, ma'am?" affectionately inquired the girl.

"Yes, but do not linger over it, child; I am tired and I must lie down," said Net, wearily.

"No wonder, indeed," sighed the little maid, in sympathy, as she wound up her mistress's hair and inclosed it in a little white silk net.

A few minutes after, her night toilet being complete, Net went to bed, and the little maid brought her a cup of tea.

When Net had drank that, the girl set down the cup and then closed the shutters, drew the curtains, mended the fire, lowered the light and finally took the tassel of the bell cord and laid it on the bed within reach of her mistress, and inquired whether she should sit by her until she —her mistress—should fall asleep.

"No, my child, you may go. If I should ring you can return to me. In the meantime, if any one should inquire for me, say that I have gone to bed and do not wish to be disturbed. Do you hear?"

"Yes, madame, and I understand. Yon shall not be disturbed. I hope you will sleep the headache off."

"I hope so," wearily replied the lady.

"Good-night, madame!"

"Good-night, child."

The little maid withdrew.

Net clasped her hands above her burning and throbbing head, and tried to pray again; but she could utter no more than the most helpless, human cry:

"Lord! Lord! Have mercy!"

Later on there came a gentle knock at her door. It was repeated two or three times before Net heard it, or rather before she noticed it or thought to answer it, so deeply was she absorbed in her troubles.

"Who is there?" she inquired, expecting to hear the voice of a servant in reply.

"It is I—Adrian. They tell me you are ill, Net. Will you let me come in?" inquired Mr. Fleming from without.

Now Net and Adrian had never been fully reconciled. He had never yet crossed the threshold of Net's chamber, wherever they might have been stopping.

Net's heart shrank within her at the sound of his voice, and at the request with which it was laden. She did not reply. She could not just then.

"Will you let me come in and see you, Net, dear?" he repeated, and his tones were kind and affectionate as were his words.

But Net was thinking of other words, in other tones, that were ringing through her memory:

" 'I do not intend to let Net bring those children to this house. * * * I shall place them in an Orphan's Home before a week is over their heads, without consulting Mistress Net.' "

These were the words that rendered her deaf and insensible to any softer words from Adrian Fleming.

"Net—do you hear me, love? Will you let me come in and see how you are?" he resumed, after a listening pause.

"No, I thank you, Mr. Fleming. My head aches very badly, and I wish to be left in silence and darkness," she replied at last.

"I am very sorry. I would like to do something for you, Net. Is there anything that I can do?"

"Nothing," she answered, wearily.

"Is there anything you would like?"

"Yes, quietness, if you please."

He took the hint and saying:

"Good-night, dear," he went away.

Then the flood gates of Net's grief were opened and she wept.

Ah! the contrast was so great between the gentle, affectionate words and tones of this evening and the cold, sarcastic, cruel words and tones of the afternoon.

Still later there was another rap on the door.

"Who is it?" inquired Net, a little impatiently.

"Nolliss, madame. May I come in for a moment?" answered the nurse who had attended Antoinette Deloraine during her last illness, and who had not yet left the house, but was going away in the morning.

"I came to see how you are, ma'am, and if I could do anything for you before I go to rest," said the woman, approaching the bed.

"No, I do not think you can," answered the sleepless and suffering girl.

"Nay, but, dear ma'am, the very weak and shaky tone of your voice proves what's the matter with you. You are as nervous and excitable as you can be. All this trou-

ble has been too much for you, ma'am, and if you do not get to sleep to-night you will be ill to-morrow, sure enough," urged the woman.

Net made no reply.

"I will mix you a composing draught, ma'am, that will put you to sleep, and give you a chance to recover yourself," said the nurse.

Net would have been glad to sleep and forget her troubles, so she answered:

"I thank you, nurse. You may give me that sleeping draught. I suppose you know how to make it?"

"I? Oh, yes, my dear ma'am, I do!" replied Nolliss; "and the sooner you have it the better. I won't be five minutes."

She left the room and encountered Mr. Fleming in the hall.

He it was, really, who had sent the nurse in to see after his wife; and now he was waiting outside to hear her report.

"How is Mrs. Fleming?" he inquired.

"She is just as nervous and excitable as it is possible for any human creetur to be, sir! I am going to give her a composing draught to quiet her, and if she gets a good sleep to-night I hope she will be all right to-morrow."

"After you have administered that composing draught, can you not remain with her through the night to watch its effects?" anxiously inquired Mr. Fleming.

"Which it is my intention so to do, sir," replied the nurse, courtesying and hurrying off on her errand.

She soon compounded the medicine and took it to the suffering girl, who took it willingly.

Net was not used to sedatives and narcotics—in fact, she had never taken either in her life—and the consequence now was that the sleeping potion took prompt and powerful effect upon her, so that she was soon buried in a profound slumber that lasted through the night and late into the forenoon of the next day.

Then she awoke much refreshed, and at first oblivious of her troubles.

The nurse was sitting by the bed.

"I hope, Mrs. Nolliss, that you have not been there all night," she said.

"I?—dear ma'am, yes! I have not left you a minute, except to get a mouthful of breakfast at nine o'clock, and then Cally Adler took my place. How do you find yourself, ma'am, if you please?"

"I am very much better, I thank you."

"But you will take your breakfast in bed?"

"Not at all. I am going to get up. I suppose the gentlemen have breakfasted?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am—two hours ago, and gone."

"Gone!" echoed Net. "Where have they gone?"

"I don't know, ma'am; but here is a note Mr. Fleming left to be given you when you waked," answered the nurse, rising, taking a paper from the mantelpiece and handing it to the lady.

By this time the tide of memory had turned and brought back all Net's troubles to her mind. She opened the note, with a sinking heart.

It ran as follows:

"DEAREST NET: I am told by the nurse that you are sleeping comfortably this morning, so I will not have you disturbed. I am going a part of the way home with Sir Adrian; but I shall be back on Saturday morning. Take care of yourself. Your true

"ADRIAN."

Net did not know how to take this note, with the news it conveyed. Was it a respite from that impending scene with her husband, which she dreaded so much, yet which she was determined to have? for she had decided to make a strong appeal to Mr. Fleming on behalf of the children.

Not that she had much hope of its success. The words that she had heard seemed to preclude all possibility of a successful appeal to him in the interests of the little orphans.

But Net resolved to hazard it all the same.

Now, however, it could not be made before Saturday morning, and Net began to feel the delay as a reprieve.

She arose and dressed herself, and partook of a slight breakfast, and then sat down and wrote to Lady Arielle Montjoie, thanking her warmly for her protection of the

children, and expressing a hope that she would be able to relieve her of the charge within a few days.

Net sent this letter off immediately to be posted.

She was very anxious to see the children, but ah! very fearful that insurmountable obstacles would be thrown in the way of her doing so effectually.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX

### MR. ADRIAN FLEMING'S EXPEDITION

ADRIAN FLEMING and his father had breakfasted privately that morning, the former apologizing for his wife's absence from the board by saying that she was temporarily ill from the effects of excessive fatigue and excitement, though not so as to occasion anxiety.

"Then perhaps you will keep your word and drive to the station with me," said the baronet.

"Certainly," replied his son.

As soon as they had breakfasted they entered the carriage that was waiting at the door and set out.

Adrian Fleming not only went to the Deloraine station with his father, but also accompanied him as far as the Deloraine Junction, where they were to separate, Sir Adrian to take the cross country train to Flemington, and Mr. Fleming to continue on to London *en route* for Cumberland.

"Now what on earth takes you to the North at this season of the year, Adrian?" inquired the baronet, just before they reached the parting place.

"Did I not tell you? I am going to see after those children," replied the young man.

"Ah! You will do. You are prompt. You have not said a word to your wife about it yet?" inquired the baronet.

"Not a syllable! She was still sleeping off that nervous headache when we left this morning."

"Oh, ah, yes, to be sure! And you will act without consulting her?"

"Of course! I told you so! I will have both the chil-

dren entered into the Orphan's Home before I say a single word to her on the subject."

"That is right. It will save a world of controversy. Now we are at the junction and I get out here. Good-by."

The baronet shook hands with his son, and got out as soon as the train stopped, and crossed the track to take another one.

The train stopped for only thirty seconds.

Adrian Fleming reached Paddington station at half past three o'clock in the afternoon, and had just time to enjoy a comfortable luncheon before starting on the four o'clock train for Cumberland.

Adrian Fleming resigned himself to sleep, and slept through the greater part of the night.

At sunrise he was aroused by the arrival of the train at the Miston Branch station, where he had to get out.

The Miston train was ready, and he took his seat in an empty compartment of a first-class carriage, and settled himself again to sleep until the train reached Miston station.

There he found the fly from the Dolphin, with Jack Ken on the box, waiting for a chance passenger.

He hailed the fly, engaged it, and told the boy to drive him on to the Dolphin.

There he ordered breakfast, and after partaking freely of coffee, muffins, toast, game, ham and eggs, he ordered fresh horses put to the fly to carry him to Castle Montjoie.

The horses then being fresh, the weight light, and the roads good, Mr. Fleming made the distance in less than two hours, and reached the castle about eleven o'clock.

On being admitted by the porter he inquired for the young Countess of Altofaire.

"Her ladyship is at Cloudland on a visit to Lord Beaudevere and Miss Desparde," answered the pompous old man.

"Ah! Well, the little children of the late Dr. Starr, who are the wards of my wife, are here, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, they are here, and in excellent health."

"In whose charge have they been left?"

"In the care of a most respectable woman, who has been engaged as head nurse, and of a nursemaid."

"Well, I have come to take the children away. I am

sorry the countess should be absent at this crisis; but if you will show me into the library and furnish me with stationery, I will write an explanatory letter to her ladyship," said Mr. Fleming.

"Certainly, sir," replied the porter, himself leading the way to the library, and laying out the writing materials upon the table.

"And you will send the nurse to me, if you please."

"Certainly, sir," replied the porter, pulling the bell.

A footman appeared in answer to it.

"Adams, go find nurse Cotton and tell her that Mr. Fleming, the gardeen of the little Starr children, have come to take them home with him," were the instructions given.

The young footman "bobbed" and disappeared, and in a few moments Mrs. Cotton entered.

She was a plump, fair, pleasant-looking matron, of perhaps fifty years of age.

"You are the children's nurse?" inquired Mr. Fleming.

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a courtesy.

"Well, I have come to take them away. I am sorry the countess is not at home, but I will leave a note for her. Can you go with them to their new home?"

"To Delorin Park where Mrs. Fleming has gone to live, as I am told, sir? Yes, sir, I think I can," answered the woman.

"Can you be ready to leave the castle by two o'clock?"

"Yes, sir, if the housemaids will help me to pack the children's clothes," said the nurse.

"The maids will *have* to do it. They have little enough to orkkepy their hands and keep 'em out of mischief, the Lord knows," put in the old porter.

"And now," said Mr. Fleming, as he folded and directed the letter and handed it to the porter, "I wish you to give this, with my warm thanks, to Lady Altofaire. And, nurse, I wish you to send the children to me here that I may renew my acquaintance with them. I used to be a favorite when I was reading with their father."

"Surely, sir, I will fetch them," said the woman.

She went out and soon returned with the children, who broke away from her hands at the sight of Adrian and rushed to him, clasping his knees, looking up in his face,

and opening the subject nearest their hearts without the slightest ceremony.

"Nurse Totton say you's doing to tate us home to mammam, and to wide in a wailwoad tar!" began Luke.

" 'To wide in the wailwoad tar,' " echoed Ella.

"Humph! Will you like to go?" inquired Adrian, with a smile.

"Oh! Wese wike it so much!" exclaimed Luke.

" 'Wike it so much!' " echoed Ella.

"Wese dlad to see oo," said Luke.

" 'Es, we is vezzy dlad to see oo," added Ella.

And both children scrambled up on his knees and hugged and kissed him.

"What is my name, now? I bet you don't know!" said Mr. Fleming.

"Oh, 'es we does! Oo's name is A-dy-wan," exclaimed Luke, in triumph.

" 'Es! Zat's it—Ade-we-in! We luzzes Ade-we-in!" added Ella, clasping the young man around the neck and giving him as strong a squeeze as her little arms could manage.

If Adrian Fleming meditated any treason against these confiding children, his heart must have been harder and blacker than his worst enemy could have conceived.

"Now, guess what I have brought you!" he exclaimed, diving his hand down in the deep pockets of his ulster, which, in the first busy hour of his arrival, he had not yet taken off.

"Nussin," replied Luke, carelessly.

"Why do you think so?"

" 'Tause you never did b'ing us nussin," added the child, speaking positively from his own experience.

"No mens never did b'ing us nussin," confirmed Ella, with a look of disapprobation. "Mammam b'ings us petty fings, and so does Ayel and Vivin and Kit, but no mens never does, now daddy's gone to Heaven."

"Did daddy bring you pretty things?" inquired Adrian, laughing.

"Ezzer so pretty!" exclaimed Luke; "but no ozer mens but daddy ezzer did."

"Wouldn't you like to have another daddy to bring you pretty things?" inquired Adrian.

"Oh, 'es, indeedy!" exclaimed both children.

"Very well, then, look here!" exclaimed the visitor, drawing from his pocket a parcel and opening it.

"*Oh-h-h-h!*" cried the children simultaneously.

The parcel contained two automaton toys—a fiddler and a dancer.

The children had cried out with delight only on beholding the figures, without suspecting their accomplishments, for the fiddler was a gorgeous youth in blue cap, red jacket and yellow trousers, and the dancer was a beautiful damsel in a green dress spangled with gold.

But when the figures were wound up and set to fiddling and dancing, the breath of the children was momentarily suspended in ecstasy and their faces were a sight to behold!

At least Adrian Fleming thought so.

Never perhaps since the days of his own infancy had the young man enjoyed a pastime at once so pleasant and so innocent as this of witnessing the amazement and delight of these children.

And now it struck him, rather as an *epicurean* in pleasure than as a benefactor, that he would like to continue such a new and droll amusement by giving the children a succession of delightful surprises before finally consigning them to the Orphan's Home he had in view.

While he was thus entertaining himself the butler entered the room and inquired at what hour, "sir," he would like luncheon.

Mr. Fleming consulted his watch and answered:

"It is now twelve o'clock. We leave the castle at two. I shall feel obliged by a glass of wine and a biscuit at about one o'clock."

The old servant bowed and inquired:

"If you would like to go to a dressing room, sir, Adams will wait on you."

"Very well, send Adams to me, and send the nurse to take the children."

The butler bowed himself out, and was succeeded by Adams and the little nursemaid, Nelly Lacy.

But the children made a rush to grab their automaton toys—Luke to seize the fiddler and Ella the dancer—to show to the girl; but, ah! the machinery had just run down and the fiddling and dancing stopped short.

"Mate em alive adain, Misser F'emin'!" said Luke, thrusting the fiddler into one of Adrian's hands, while Ella pushed the dancer into the other.

The young man, laughing good-humoredly, wound them up, the fiddler first and then the dancer, and set them going on the table.

Then leaving the children to the care of Nelly, with the direction to remember and have them ready for their journey at two o'clock, he followed the footman, who conducted him to a bedroom and dressing room where he might refresh his toilet.

At one o'clock Adrian Fleming sat down to a luncheon, where the stipulated modest "glass of wine and biscuit" was amplified into oysters on the half shell, pigeon pie, Westphalia ham, quince tarts, calf-foot jelly, pale sherry and sparkling Moselle.

Adrian Fleming could always appreciate a good meal, and he did full justice to this.

At two o'clock the carriage that had brought Adrian Fleming to the castle was again at the door, and the children were all ready and eager for the journey.

Well wrapped up in their fur-lined coats, they were standing in the lower hall, while one of the grooms stood holding open the door of the carriage. They were all waiting for Mr. Fleming, who was drawing on his gloves.

Anxious as the little ones had been for this journey, at the very last they had raised some objections to leaving unless certain conditions, for which they stipulated, should be fulfilled.

Among the rest was the chief one—that P'udence should go.

"And who's P'udence?" demanded the young man.

"Oo not know who P'udence is?" inquired Luke, in a tone of pity bordering on contempt, for the gentleman's ignorance.

"P'udence is our tat," exclaimed Ella.

"And wese not doe wizzout her," said Luke.

"Quite right! Take the cat. If they don't like her at the Orphan's Home they can lose her or drown her. What I want to do is to get you peaceably there and be done with it."

All but the first two words of this speech was spoken *sotto voce,* and did not reach the ears of the children.

Another stipulation was that Nelly, their nursemaid, should go; and to that also their good-natured guardian assented with the same mental reservation.

"If they don't want these women at the Orphan's Home, as probably they will not, I can pay their way back here again. All *I* want is a comfortable and pleasant journey with the little folks until I turn them over into other hands, and then let other people take all the discomfort and unpleasantness of crossing them, if they choose."

So the old nurse, Mrs. Cotton, the maid Nelly, and the cat Prudence, who, with sundry growlings, spitting and scratching, had been put into a covered basket and fastened down, became the companions of their journey.

Mr. Fleming, the children, and the cat, rode in the carriage, and the two women and the luggage in the "break" that followed it.

They reached Miston in time to take the four o'clock train.

Mr. Fleming engaged a whole compartment in a first-class carriage for himself and the children, and sent the two women and the cat into the second class, and so they started.

This journey with two intelligent, curious and inquisitive children might have been considered a troublesome one by most gentlemen, but not so by Adrian Fleming, who never permitted anything to trouble him.

He was highly amused in watching the children's delight in their first railroad ride.

And before he had time to be wearied with them they reached Miston Branch Junction, where they were to change trains.

He put the children and their cat in a compartment with the two women, and took another for himself and his cigar.

The train reached London at a late hour in the evening.

The children were fast asleep and had to be aroused in order to be taken from the carriage.

Mr. Fleming engaged rooms at the Paddington Hotel, and the little ones were conveyed thither and put to bed by the nurses.

Adrian Fleming went out and telegraphed to his wife that he had run up to London on business and would be detained there the whole of the next day, but would start for Deloraine Park the next evening and reach home on the following morning.

Having sent this dispatch he returned to the hotel and ordered dinner, and after partaking of it, went to the theater to spend the evening.

So ended his day.

On Friday morning he arose late, breakfasted later, and then rang for the nurse and inquired for the children.

"If you please, sir," began Mrs. Cotton, "the precious lambs have been going on like wild cats all the morning, in their impatience to get at you."

"Very well! Dress them up for a ride and bring them to me. I am going out with them."

In less than fifteen minutes the children were brought to Mr. Fleming, accoutred for their drive.

They were "uproarously" glad to see him, climbed over and over him and covered him with caresses.

"Well! Do you want to go out and ride in a carriage, and see all the beautiful shops where the walking dolls and the fiddlers and dancers come from?"

"Oh, 'es, Misser Flemin'!"

"Look here," said Adrian. "Didn't you tell me that no 'mens' but 'daddy' ever gave you anything?"

" 'Es, wese did," said Luke.

"Well, then, if I give you things, you ought to call *me* daddy."

"Aw wight, daddy!" said Luke, while Ella burst out laughing.

He led them downstairs and put them into a carriage and took them first to Madame Taussaud's wax work show, at which they were in raptures.

After that he gave them a lunch at the pastry cook's near, and allowed them to have just whatever they liked. Then he took them to an afternoon circus, where they seemed to have lost their senses in wonder and delight.

It was late in the afternoon when they came out and reentered the carriage.

Then Adrian took them to the Burlington Arcade, in the Strand—that paradise of toys. And here he let them run

wild among the treasures and get everything they wanted; and, though the amusement cost him a considerable sum, he thought it worth the money.

"Besides, it is their last day out in the wicked world—poor little imps!—so let them make the most of it."

Finally he took them home to the hotel to tea.

"Well, how do you like London?" he inquired, laughing as he sat at table and watched them devouring bread and butter and jam.

"Oh, I fink wese have tomed to heaven!" cried Luke, rapturously.

Adrian laughed aloud.

"Wot oo laugh for, daddy?" inquired Ella.

"Because I think that with all this sight-seeing and gormandizing you will soon have reason to think you have come to the other place! However, we have had the fun; now let the people at the Orphan's Home have the trouble!" said Mr. Fleming.

The children stared. They did not understand him.

And very soon they had to be prepared to resume their journey.

The hotel was but a few steps from the station, and the whole party were soon on board the train, where Adrian Fleming had put the children, nurses and cat, in one compartment to themselves and taken another for himself.

Adrian Fleming lighted and smoked out one fine Havana and threw away the stump. Then he pulled his traveling cap down over his eyes, thrust his hands down in the deep pockets of his ulster, turned himself sideways on his double seat, drew up his feet, leaned back his head, closed his eyes and settled himself to slumber through the night journey.

Meanwhile the two women in the first-class carriage having the compartment to themselves, the children and the cat, and seeing the tired and sleepy children nod and pitch about, made up a bed of shawls and cloaks on the cushions of the opposite seat, and after loosening the clothes of the little ones, laid them there, where they slept soundly through all the noise and turmoil of travel, until the train stopped at the station nearest the Clerical Orphan's Home selected by Adrian Fleming for their future residence.

And this was not very far from Deloraine Park.

## CHAPTER XL

### WHAT THOSE BITTER WORDS MEANT

NET FLEMING had passed another sleepless night and anxious day, and then, on the Thursday evening, she received the telegram from her husband announcing that he was detained in London on business, but would leave town on Friday evening and reach Deloraine station at 7 A. M. on Saturday morning, and would like to have the close carriage sent to meet him.

This was no more than Net had expected; for he had told her in his note of leave-taking that he should be back again on Saturday morning.

Thursday night and Friday morning passed in poignant anxiety, and Friday afternoon brought a letter that threw Net into despair.

It was from Lady Arielle Montjoie, in answer to Net's letter of Wednesday, and it conveyed the startling intelligence that Mr. Adrian Fleming had arrived at the castle on the Thursday morning and taken the children away during her absence in spending the day with her friend Vivienne at Cloudland.

Lady Arielle told this news without a suspicion that the children had been removed without the knowledge and consent of their little mammam.

She concluded her letter by hoping that the little ones might have a pleasant journey to Deloraine Park, and that Net might find them looking well and happy on their arrival.

"And she thinks that *I* sent for them, and that Mr. Fleming is bringing them here, when in fact he is taking them off to that Orphan's Home! *'Orphan's Home!'* Orphan's Prison! Orphan's Purgatory, rather! Oh, my poor babies! I would almost rather have laid you in your little graves! And how can I respect my husband after this? How can I even trust him? Oh, Adrian! Adrian! how you have fallen!" she wailed.

In all her trouble, however, she did not forget to send an order to the stables that the coachman should leave the Park at five o'clock the next morning and go to Delo-

raine station to meet his master, who would arrive at seven.

Then she retired to her own room, prayed and went to bed—not to sleep, but to think of the children and the dreary, desolate life they would lead at the misnamed "Home," to resolve that she would not abandon them to such captivity without a struggle, but that she would expostulate with Adrian Fleming and remind him of his own words in regard to herself and these children, that "none but a brute would desire to separate them from her."

But Net did not believe that her expostulations would have any effect. She could not comfort herself with any such hope.

She began, as she lay there in her misery, to repeat over to herself the consoling promises of the Holy Word:

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee."

"Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

She tried to do this. She prayed for grace and strength to do it; but, nothwithstanding all her efforts she could not get rid of her trouble in that way, and so it was near morning before she fell asleep and slept the profound sleep of mental and bodily exhaustion.

It was nine o'clock in the forenoon when she opened her eyes. She did not know whether she had awakened naturally, or whether she had been aroused by the commotion below, that now seemed to be ascending the stairs and approaching her own room.

There seemed to be many voices and many steps. Wondering what could be the matter, Net arose, thrust her feet into slippers, drew on her dressing gown, and went and opened the door.

She started back in astonishment, for she found herself confronted with Adrian Fleming, who had just reached the spot, with a child on each shoulder.

Yes! amazing as it seemed, there were her two babies, in their brown fur coats and hats, reminding her of two little rabbits.

"Well, Net! I have stolen a march on you and brought the children home! 'Actions speak louder than words,' my Net! And so I thought I would go and fetch the imps myself by way of convincing you that they should be wel-

come," he exclaimed in a joyous tone, as he set the children down upon their feet.

"Daddy toot wese to ze cirtus to see ze wile beases," cried Luke, running to his little mammam.

"And divved wese fizzlin' and dancin' dollies," added Ella, clasping little mammam's knees.

Net sat down on the nearest chair and drew the children to her, and embraced and kissed them fondly before she faltered:

"I heard—I thought—I heard you tell the baronet that —that I should never bring the children here, but that—you would put them in the Orphan's Home!"

"Ha, ha, ha! *You* heard that? *How* did you hear that, Net?"

"I—was in my dressing room, you were in Sir Adrian's. They join with only a thin partition, and I heard. I did not listen, but I could not help hearing."

"And you heard me tell Sir Adrian that I never meant to let you bring the children here, but meant to put them in an Orphan's Home?"

"Yes," faltered Net, as she caressed her babies.

"Well, you heard aright. I *did* say that. I never meant that you should bring the children here, for I meant to take all that trouble off your hands and bring them myself. And I meant to put them in an Orphan's Home, and *this* is the home for the orphans into which I meant to put them. Ha, ha, ha! Do you understand now, my Net?" he demanded gayly.

"Oh, Adrian, how much misery it would have saved me if I had known this sooner. But did Sir Adrian understand your words as you have explained them to me?" inquired Net, between the caresses she was lavishing on her recovered children.

"No! He understood them as you did. I could not have a row with the governor on account of these little chaps, you know. But, dear Net, if I could have guessed that you had ever heard those words of mine I should have explained them to you before I left the house. I only went in that secret way to prepare a pleasant surprise for you in the arrival of these children."

"Oh, Adrian, how unjust I have been to you," said Net.

"I think that is quite likely," laughed the young man—

adding: "I am not half a bad fellow, Net! And if you could only forgive my bad behavior at a time when I was crazy, and could give me another chance, you would find that I am not irreclaimably and unpardonably wicked."

"Oh, dear Adrian! It is not *you* whom I cannot pardon, but *myself!* Don't you understand, dear, that I cannot forgive myself for making that humiliating mistake of accepting from you the offer of marriage that was intended for another woman," said Net, between laughing and crying, as the tear-drops sparkled through her smiles like rain-drops through the sunshine.

"You accepted an offer of marriage that should have been made to you and you only, for you, and you only, had the right to expect such a one," gravely replied Adrian

"MAMMAM!" exclaimed Luke, who was as exacting of attention as ever, "less me down to do and see about P'udence? P'udence is in ze bastet!"

"And dit ze fizzler and dancer to show oo!" added Ella.

Both children were now struggling to get away; so Net released them, and Adrian opened the chamber door, at which stood Nelly the nursemaid ready to take them in charge.

And so, through the children, a full reconciliation was effected between the young married pair.

"But, Adrian, you must never permit those ridiculous children to call you 'daddy!'" exclaimed happy Net, smiling through her tears.

"Why not, if they like to?" inquired the young man, laughing.

"Because it is *too* absurd!"

"But they call you 'mammy,' or something like it."

"Oh! but I am used to hearing them do that. They began to do it with their first cry, I do believe. But whatever could have put it into their little noddles to call you 'daddy'?"

"Because I married their mammy, I suppose."

"Nonsense, Adrian. What did they know about that?"

"Can't say. Young England is very knowing."

"But how came they to do it? Tell me that."

"Then I suppose it was because I gave them gifts, and no other 'mens,' as they say, except their daddy, ever gave them anything."

"Such an *old* title! They might as well call you 'granddad.'"

"They may if they like! What odds? But now, my dear Net, let us at once go seriously into the subject of these children and settle their status with us."

"What is it that you wish in regard to them, Adrian?" inquired Net, a little doubtfully and fearfully, for a sudden suspicion seized her that she might not have understood him aright, and that he might wish to send the children away, after all.

"What do I wish? I wish, as I suppose you do, to keep the children here under our own eyes, and bring them up as if they were our own little brother and sister, left to our love and care."

"Oh! Adrian, shall we do that? Oh, you *are* good! You are *so* good! No one knows how good you are but myself!" exclaimed Net, catching his hand and caressing it.

"I told you I wasn't half a bad fellow, didn't I?" laughed the young man; and then he resumed: "You remember Antoinette spoke of some personal property of her own which she wished to give to these children, and would have given had she been of legal age to make a will?"

"Yes, I remember."

"And that she left it with you, as heiress, to carry out her wishes in this respect?"

"Yes."

"Well, Net, we must do so. I have consulted her lawyers. This property consists of money, which has accumulated, during her long minority, and is at present lying idle in bank. It amounts to about ten thousand pounds. It must be at once invested in the names of these orphan children, and the interest must be left to accumulate until they shall have reached their majority. You and I, Net, will in the meantime be at the cost of their maintenance and education.

"Oh, Adrian, how good you are!"

"Not nearly so wicked a fellow as you thought me when you overheard that conversation between my father and myself, and misunderstood me! Ah! Net, you know the old proverb—'Listeners never hear any good——'"

"I was not listening willingly, Adrian," interrupted Net, with a violent blush.

"Do I not know that, Net? But, oh! my dear, if I had thought you had heard and misunderstood that conversation, I should never have gone off and left you to that terrible suspense. I was planning a joyful surprise for you, my dear Net; but if I had known, I should have given you a prosy explanation instead of a pleasant surprise.

"It has been a pleasant, a joyful, a delightful surprise, Adrian. And now I think we will get ready for our breakfast," said Net, who all this time had been sitting in her wrapper and slippers.

Adrian laughed and went off to his dressing room to change his dusty traveling suit.

Nelly Lacy answered Net's summons and took off the children for the same purpose.

Half an hour later they all met around the breakfast table, to which, for this occasion only, and because it was the day of their arrival at their new home, the two children were allowed to come.

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## CHAPTER XLI

### LORD BEAUDEVERE'S STORY TOLD BY A CHRISTMAS FIRESIDE

It was Christmas Eve.

In the great hall of Cloudland a huge wood fire was burning. From the lofty oak ceiling, dark and polished by time and not by art, the ancient iron cresset swung and lighted a scene that might have belonged to the ninth rather than to the nineteenth century.

This hall was the most ancient part of the building. Klodt, the Saxon, with his rude boors, had feasted there long before it passed into the hands of his conqueror, John or Jean Beaue, the groom of Norman William and the ancestor of the Barons Beaudevere.

Through all the restorations, enlargements and modern improvements of the castle, the barons had never allowed this hall to be touched, except in one particular: in the reign of one of the earlier Henrys the great chimney at the farther end opposite the door had been built. And ever

since that time, at Christmas tide, the yule log had been yearly drawn in and laid on the back of the immense cavernous fireplace, and the baron's family had there gathered around the Christmas fire.

It was a weird, ghostly, yet interesting and fascinating scene.

The heavy stone walls were decorated with stags' antlers, and other trophies of the chase, and hung with ancient armor and weapons, and looked as if they were haunted by the forms of old knights—

"Whose swords were rust,
Whose bones were dust;
Whose souls were with
The Lord, we trust."

It was furnished with heavy oaken tables, chairs and settles, before which were laid, in lieu of rugs, well-tanned skins of leopards, bears and buffaloes.

Never in all the centuries had lain so huge a yule log or blazed so splendid a fire as this that burned in the ancient chimney place and lighted the old hall.

A historical oak, a marvel of age and size, had stood in the Cloudland forest from time immemorial. It had long ceased to show a leaf in summer, and every winter its dry twigs rattled and fell with every blast.

In the preceding summer a thunderbolt had blasted the patriarch of centuries. Then the baron's steward had ordered the riven giant limbs to be cut and sawed and given away by cords of wood to the poor on the estate, and the huge bole to be trimmed and carted to the castle for the yule log.

Now it was blazing in the broad fireplace of the castle hall, and around it were gathered a group consisting of Lord Beaudevere, Lady Arielle Montjoie, Miss Desparde, and Mr. Valdimir Desparde.

The order to serve dinner was given, and in a few moments it was announced.

Lord Beaudevere gave his arm to Lady Arielle, and Valdimir to his sister, and so they went into the dining room and enjoyed a very good meal.

After dinner they adjourned to the hall, gathered around

the great fire, seated themselves on the old oaken chairs, and, with their feet, upon the lion's skin that did duty for a rug, began to talk of Christmas times, ancient as well as modern—a theme suggested by the surroundings as well as by the season.

It was noticeable that this talk was chiefly among the three young people, and that Lord Beaudevere gave brief and often eccentric answers to questions and remarks addressed to him. He seemed troubled and abstracted.

Presently, in the lull of the conversation, he said:

"I think, my young friends, that the hour has come when I must tell you that passage in my early history, which, from morbid sensitiveness, I have hitherto kept from you."

Lady Arielle, feeling that this address was made to Valdimir and Vivienne, and that the story to be told concerned them, arose quietly to steal away from the hall.

But Lord Beaudevere stopped her with a word:

"Stay! Resume your seat, Lady Arielle. This interests you as well as ourselves. Are you not one of us?"

The young lady sat down again gladly, for, in truth, she was as curious as any one to hear the story of Lord Beaudevere's early life, as it affected her betrothed husband and his sister.

Lord Beaudevere passed his hand once and again over his thoughtful and troubled brow, then smiled on the expectant circle, and began:

### BEAUE'S LITTLE ROMANCE

"My father, the late baron, had but one son and no daughter. He lost my mother when I was but a few months old, and he never gave her a successor. It followed that my earliest idea of my mother was of an angel in heaven.

"I had, therefore, neither brother nor sister, but in place of both—in place of all childish companions—I had my little cousin, my father's orphan niece, whom he had adopted for the sake of his dear lost sister.

"We were of the same age, and as much attached to each other as any twin pair that ever lived. The nurses used to call us the 'love birds.'

"We shared the same nursery until we were five years

old, when we were separated. That was the first sorrow of my life, and you will laugh, my lad and lasses, when I tell you it was one of my sharpest.

"But think of it! I had never, within my memory, gone to sleep except with my arms around Vivi's neck, or hers around mine. So I cried all night in my lonesome crib, and so had she in hers, as I learned when I met her at the nursery breakfast the next morning—met her with as much joy as if we had been parted for years instead of for hours!

"We still shared the same day nursery, and the same lessons under our young nursery governess, until we were seven years old, when a more accomplished teacher took charge of us, a lady, who conducted our education for the next three years.

"Then came another trial, and we were separated by day as well as by night. A tutor was engaged for me and I took my lessons in a room off my father's library instead of in the school room, which was given up now to Vivi and her governess.

"But still we met at meal times, where we also enjoyed the society and surveillance of the tutor and governess. And so two more years passed away, and I had to go to Eton. I pass over that parting. I do not suppose that any school boy in existence ever behaved so badly as I did on leaving home; it was all because I was leaving Vivi.

"But if any boy ever carries anything sentimental or mawkish to Eton College it is bound to be knocked and cuffed out of him, mind you. To say nothing of my studies which really did engage and interest my mind, I had fights enough on my hands to employ all my leisure time and keep me from pining after Vivi.

"But when the holidays drew near all my slumbering love was reawakened, and I thought of nothing but of going home and meeting Vivi.

"And every time I went home and saw her she seemed more beautiful than ever, and I loved her more.

"I spent four years at Eton, and then came home for a visit previous to entering the university at Oxford.

I was then a mere stripling of sixteen, *not* tall for my age—quite the reverse—for I was of slow growth, and no taller nor stouter than many a boy of thirteen.

"I came home and found Vivi, at sixteen years of age,

shot up into a beautiful and blooming young woman, a head taller than myself. This was mortifying to me, especially as she assumed the airs of a woman and treated me as a child.

"I was then a mere stripling of sixteen, *not* tall for my India. The letters and documents came just a few days before I was to have left home for Oxford to enter Trinity College—where, by the way, all my forefathers and uncles have been educated since the college was founded.

"The news was that our uncle—my father's and Vivi's mother's brother—a wealthy merchant of Calcutta, had died unmarried, and left the whole of his immense wealth to his sole nephew, John Beaue, and sole niece, Vivienne Leville—share and share alike—upon one condition—that they should marry each other. But if either one should refuse to marry the other, the party so refusing should forfeit all share in the estate, which should then go undivided to the party refused, with the further condition that the last inheritor should have no power to alienate any part of the property in favor of the defaulting and disinherited one, and in case of attempting to do so, should forfeit the whole, which should then go to found a Lunatic Asylum.

"Such was the purport of our uncle's will. My father told me he hoped I would not be such an idiot as to forfeit such a splendid fortune by refusing to marry Vivienne Leville.

"I told him, with truth, that, on the contrary, so far was I from any thoughts of refusing to marry my cousin, and so dear was she to my soul, that if my uncle and my father had both threatened to disinherit me *for* marrying her, I should have tried to win her all the same.

"My father wanted the betrothal to take place then; so did I, you may depend. This was accomplished without any love-making on my part. We three—my father, my cousin and myself—being together in the drawing room, after dinner, my father broached the subject to Vivi, by speaking of our uncle's death and reading the will.

" 'If you accept the conditions of the will and marry John, my girl, you will be the future Baroness Beaudevere, with an income from your united fortunes of fifty thousand pounds a year. Come, what do you say?'

" 'Jack has not asked me yet,' laughed my cousin.

" 'Has not he? Well, he told me just now that he had meant to marry you, if he could get you, even if the consequences had been his disinheritance.'

" 'Did you say that, Jack?' she asked.

" 'Yes, and I meant it, Vivi,' I stammered, for I was an awkward boy, then at the most awkward age of boyhood.

" 'Very well, then. It is settled,' said my father; and he took our hands and joined them.

" 'Is it settled, Vivi?' I asked.

" 'Yes,' she laughed.

" 'And you *will* be my wife, truly?' I asked breathlessly.

" 'Of course,' she answered. 'Do you suppose I am going to forfeit fifty thousand pounds per annum for *you?* Go along, boy!'

"Though I was not quite satisfied with the way in which she answered me and could have wished she had been more earnest, I went away to Oxford next morning as happy as a king! I was *sure* of her now, or at least I *thought* so! I sent her a betrothal ring from London set with a solitaire diamond worth a farm.

"No day was yet fixed for our marriage. We were yet but young. It was understood, however, that we were betrothed to each other, and neither of us in the matrimonial market. The baron, my father, was so well satisfied with our engagement that he took very good care to let it be known generally.

"At the end of every college term I came home here to visit my cousin, my betrothed. And every time found her more lovely and attractive. She did not keep on growing taller. She had stopped growing, for which circumstance I was very thankful; for *I* had not stopped growing. I was quickly overtaking her in height. When we were both eighteen I was as tall as she was. When we were twenty-one I was half a head taller.

"Then I graduated from old Trinity with some honor, and we all came up to London to our town house for the season.

"My father, from excessive caution, had not brought my young cousin up for a season in town before this, lest there should be some possible chance of some other aspirant for her hand that might make trouble; but now that I had

left the university never to return, and our marriage day was fixed and near at hand, we all came up to town for the season and occupied our house in South Audley street. We got the dowager Lady Leville, a distant relation of my mother's, to come and stay with us to chaperone Vivi.

"Vivi was first of all presented at court and then entered society—*threw* herself into it rather—wildly, madly, as only a country girl secluded from the world until she was twenty-one and then brought out in London at the height of the fashionable season, under such auspices as hers, could do.

"I went with her everywhere, followed her, watched her, closely, jealously. Among the many admirers her beauty and reputed wealth drew around her was one whom I cannot even now recall without a pang—Thadeus Valdimir Desparde, a captain in the horse guards. He was called by women the handsomest and most fascinating man in London. He was called by the men the best, freest and most generous fellow alive.

"I cannot dwell upon this part of the story, my friends—I suffered the tortures of souls in purgatory when I saw how interested in this man my cousin had become. No, I cannot go into details. Even my father saw the danger at last, and he expostulated with his niece, and—only offended her.

"Our marriage day drew near. Our wedding was to have taken place in London. But my father, seeing the danger, suddenly resolved to leave town and have our marriage celebrated at Cloudland. Vivienne made no opposition to the plan, and my hopes of happiness were revived,—only for a few hours, however, for the day before we were to have left London Vivienne Leville disappeared."

Here the baron paused in his story and put his hand to his head—a gesture common to him when disturbed.

Miss Desparde, whose eyes had been fixed on him with the deepest sympathy throughout his narration, now left her seat and drew a hassock to his side, sat down by him and took his hand and kissed it.

The baron drew his hand away from her and laid it on her head with a gesture of benediction. Then he resumed his story with more cheerfulness:

"When we next heard of my cousin she was the wife of

Captain Desparde. She wrote a letter to my father and myself, pleading forgiveness, saying that she loved me as a dear brother, but *could* not think of me in any other light; that she loved Captain Desparde with all the strength of her being, and was willing to forfeit for his sake the coronet of Beaudevere and the wealth of the Indies, and to go with him to Jamaica, where the regiment into which he had exchanged, was ordered.

"That was the last we heard of Vivienne for seven years. I had a brain fever, but got over it without any lasting injury to my constitution. A year passed away, and my father urged upon me my duty, as an only son and the sole heir to the old barony, to marry. But I could not bring my mind to it. Four more years passed away, and then my father left me. He had been a childless widower and long past middle age when he married my mother, and so he was quite aged when he passed away, and I, at the age of twenty-six, became the last Baron of Beaudevere.

"I traveled on the Continent for two years, and then returned to Cloudland, a disappointed, solitary, but, thank Heaven! not a soured or embittered man.

"Then I one day received a letter that gave me an electric shock! a letter from my cousin Vivienne, asking me to come to her for the Lord's sake, for that she was widowed and dying in destitution and dishonor——"

"DISHONOR!" exclaimed Valdimir and Vivienne, in one voice of agony.

"Stay! She thought so. It was *her* mistake then, as it was *yours* afterwards, my lad. And from the same cause. You were in error. No dishonor ever attached to your name, my young cousins. And now let me go on.

"I read the letter in my eagerness, on recognizing her handwriting, before I even looked at the date. When I did, I saw that it was written from Kingston on the Island of Jamaica. You will despise me, my young people, but I arose up from reading that letter, 'all on fire with joy,' determined to go at once—to start that very day for London, and sail in the first ship or craft, whatever it might be, that should leave the West India Docks. And I knew that one or more left every day; for I had resolved to marry my cousin yet if she would have me—to marry her

widowed and destitute and dying as she was, and dishonored as she might be, if such a thing could be possible.

"I went down to London without a servant; I found a sailing ship outward bound with the tide and engaged my passage on her. In due time I reached the Island of Jamaica and the town of Kingston. I found my kinswoman, with two children, in poor lodgings, and in a dying condition—much further gone than I had expected to find her; to have spoken of marriage to her would have been the bitterest mockery.

"I found her suffering not only from bodily but from mental distress. She gave me a history of her short married life. It had been a happy marriage, because it had been a love match, although her husband had been wild, very wild, and had got into debt, and finally been obliged to sell out his commission under penalty of being dismissed from her majesty's service—only for debt, for nothing worse at that time, she said.

"But then she hesitated, wept, wrung her hands, and—could not tell me, but showed me a paper. My dears, you know the fallacy of newspaper reports? A garbled account of that execution in New Orleans had been published in the *West Indian Signal,* by which it was made to appear that Captain Valdimir Desparde was the felon who had suffered the extreme penalty of the law on that occasion.

"I was shocked beyond all measure, but I was also very incredulous. I knew there must have been some mistake. But my first care was to remove my dying cousin and her two children to more comfortable apartments, and to provide her with all that her condition required, the best medical attendance among the rest.

"Then—as I could not talk with *her* upon a subject so extremely distressing and exciting—I set about, through other channels, to find out the truth in regard to Captain Desparde. And I soon learned it, as *she* might have learned if she had known how to inquire.

"I discovered that Captain Desparde had left Kingston to go on some business to New Orleans, had remained there but a short time and embarked on a steamboat to return to his wife and children, whom, it appears, he had fondly loved through all his wild career, when the steamer

was wrecked and many of the crew and passengers were lost.

"His name, by some mistake, never appeared in the list of the lost, nor was it known to his wife that he had embarked on that ill-fated ship. But I ascertained the fact beyond all doubt.

"It was much easier to assure myself of the identity of the felon who was executed in New Orleans under the *alias* of Valdimir Desparde.

"When I found myself in possession of the whole unquestionable truth I made it known to my cousin and soothed her last hours with the good news that her husband had died a blameless man, and notwithstanding all his wildness, had left an unstained name to their children.

"And I promised to adopt those children, and bring them up as my own. A week after that my cousin fell asleep in my arms to wake no more in this lower world. We left her mortal remains in St. John's Cemetery at Kingston, and I brought her children home with me.

"My lad and lasses, my story is told, and now you know why I have lived a bachelor all my past life, and why I must expect to be solitary all my future," concluded the baron, with a sigh and a smile.

Vivienne, who was still sitting on a low hassock at his feet, holding his hand, and gazing up into his face with her dark eyes full of tenderest sympathy and deepest reverence, now spoke in low, impassioned tones:

"Not solitary while I live, dearest Beaue. She treated you badly, Beaue, but she could not help it, you know, if she loved somebody else. She would have treated you worse if she had been false to herself and married you under such circumstances. And, dearest Beaue, she left you *me*—my mother left you *me*—and I will never leave you—never, never leave you!"

The baron laid his hand upon her beautiful young head and smiled as he might have smiled on a child, as he said:

"But some one may be taking you away from me, dear. I could not be so selfish as to wish to prevent that."

"I know what you mean, Beaue," said Vivienne. "You mean that I may be asked in marriage. Well, I have often been asked. I could not help it, with all my coldness and discouragement of such offers; but I shall never, never

leave you, Beaue, and, of course, never marry—unless——" Her voice failed.

"Unless what, my dear?" inquired the baron, kindly stroking her head.

She did not answer, nor did he understand her.

Would he *ever* understand her?

Hardly; for Beaue was rather self-depreciating in all respects; and besides that, he was one of those who could not be made to believe a truth—sometimes made manifest—that a young woman could love an old man.

He turned to Valdimir and said:

"You will now perhaps understand the morbid sensitiveness that kept me silent on the subject of your early life, Desparde."

The young man bowed gravely. He was thinking how much Lord Beaudevere must have veiled under the convenient term of "wildness" that was at least reprehensible in the career of the late Captain Desparde. The selling of his commission to pay his debts; the subsequent bringing of his family to destitution—and leaving them so in a foreign city, while he himself went off somewhere else—all these circumstances in themselves hinted at a story that might yet be told, not pleasant for the son to hear.

But he had heard enough.

And now the clock struck twelve, and the Christmas bells rang out in joyous peals of welcome as to a new-born babe.

The circle around the fire arose and smilingly exchanged their mutual good wishes, and retired to rest.

Lady Arielle Montjoie, as we have continued to call her, because of her extreme youth and our own habit, although since the death of the late earl she had been Countess of Altofaire—remained at Cloudland until after Twelfth day, and then returned to Castle Montjoie, accompanied by Vivienne.

Early in the new year came news of Brandon Coyle. The officers that had been sent out in pursuit of him returned without him and with intelligence that under any other circumstances must have been received with grief, but under the existing ones was hailed by his relatives with a sense of infinite relief.

Brandon Coyle had never reached the shores of the New World.

One stormy winter day, when the ship was in extreme peril off the coast of Newfoundland, and he persisted in staying on deck against the advice of the officers, he was blown overboard and drowned. Rescue had been impossible. Even his body was irrevocably lost.

The captain of the ship took charge of his effects and held them subject to the order of his heirs.

The detective officers on their arrival at New York learned these facts, took possession of the property of the deceased and returned with it to England. After making their report to the Chief of Police, they came down to Caveland and delivered up their trust to old Mr. Coyle.

Four thousand nine hundred pounds of the five thousand drawn upon the forged check were recovered and returned to the bank.

And old Mr. Coyle and his niece breathed freely. This ending was so much better than that which they had had every reason to fear for Brandon Coyle.

The old squire, "with the sigh of a great deliverance," took his niece to Italy for the winter.

While they were sojourning in Rome they made the acquaintance of a young Roman gentleman of incredible nobility and poverty, who, attracted by the beauty and wealth of the heiress, laid his title and his destitution at her feet.

Aspirita, in desperation, accepted them and became the Marchesa Maniola.

Old Mr. Coyle returned to his native land with a double sense of satisfaction and security. Brandon could never now be hung for murder; Aspirita would never now run away with a footman.

He settled down to his own quiet, kindly, comfortable life at Caveland, beloved and honored by his servants and tenantry, and esteemed and respected by his neighbors.

And so we leave the old squire.

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## MARRIAGE IN MAY WEATHER

In the prime of the spring a happy party was gathered at Castle Montjoie to witness the marriage of John Beaue,

Baron Beaudevere, of Cloudland, to Vivienne, only daughter of the late Captain Desparde, of her majesty's army; and also that of Mr. Valdimir Desparde with Arielle Montjoie, Countess of Altofaire.

Yes, Beaue was happy at last—as happy as it was in the nature of man to be—in the assurance of his young bride's pure and devoted love, which had grown for him from her childhood up, and had been founded on an admiration for his character which almost amounted to adoration.

By Arielle's instance, the marriage of the baron and his chosen bride took precedence, but was immediately followed by that of Mr. Desparde and the young countess.

The ceremonies were performed in the chapel by the Rev. Mr. Lucas, assisted by the Rev. Mr. Matthew, and were conducted in a very unostentatious manner.

The brides were dressed alike in white silk, with white Brussels lace veils, orange flower wreaths, and pearl ornaments. There were no bridemaids nor groomsmen.

In the first marriage Valdimir Desparde gave his sister away. In the second marriage the baron performed the same office for the young countess.

The witnesses were very few—old Mr. Coyle, Dr. Bennet, Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Fleming, and the family solicitor, who had come down for the marriage settlements, and the upper servants, who were gathered in the rear.

The old housekeeper and butler were aghast at this simplicity, and declared that it was enough to make all the old earls and countesses rise up out of their coffins and come in procession to remonstrate against their last descendant being married in this plain manner.

And they told each other traditions that had been handed down to them about the grand weddings of former times at Castle Montjoie.

After the last ceremony the company adjourned to the dining room, where the wedding breakfast was laid.

Old Squire Coyle was invited to take the head of the table. All honor was done this old gentleman by the neighbors that loved him.

The breakfast went on merrily.

Mr. Adrian Fleming arose in his place and made a little speech in proposing the health of the two brides.

Beaudevere arose and responded on the part of the ladies.

Then other healths were drunk, and the merry meal came to an end.

The brides withdrew to change their wedding dresses for traveling suits of lavender poplin, with sacks, hats and gloves to match, and half an hour later drove off in an open carriage with their husbands, followed by a shower of good wishes and old slippers.

They drove together to the Miston station and took the London train *en route* for Paris.

They passed the conventional four weeks very pleasantly in the French capital, and then returned to their country homes in Cumberland.

Mr. Desparde and the young countess took up their abode at Castle Montjoie, and Lord and Lady Beaudevere settled down at Cloudland.

They visited each other often.

* * * * * * *

Only a few years have passed since then, but children have been born to both households, and girls and boys are growing up in the old homes.

Valdimir Desparde is no longer the heir presumptive of the Barony of Beaudevere, for an heir-apparent has seen the light; but Valdimir is compensated in another way. By the terms of the marriage settlements, it will be remembered, he had agreed to assume the name and arms of Montjoie. For that reason and others, within three years after his marriage with the last heiress of the house, he was granted the reversion of the old title and became the Earl of Altofaire.

THE END

BRANDON COYLE'S WIFE

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